MEDITATIONS
OR
CONTEMPLATIONS
OF THE
PARLOR STOVE.

PHILADELPHIA
PUBLISHED BY JAMES B SMITH & CO
146 CHESTNUT STREET

MEDITATIONS

AND

CONTEMPLATIONS.

BY

JAMES HERVEY, A.M.

WITH A SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.

PHILADELPHIA:
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TO MISS R—— T——.

MADAM,

THESE Reflections, the one on the deepest, the other on the gayest scenes of nature, when they proceeded privately from the pen, were addressed to a lady of the most valuable endowments, who crowned all her other endearing qualities, by a fervent love of Christ and an exemplary conformity to his divine pattern. She, alas! lives no longer on earth; unless it be in the honours of a distinguished character, and in the bleeding remembrance of her acquaintance.

It is impossible, madam, to wish you a richer blessing, or a more substantial happiness, than that the same spirit of unfeigned faith, the same course of undefiled religion, which have enabled her to triumph over death, may both animate and adorn your life. And you will permit me to declare, that my chief inducement in requesting your acceptance of the following Meditations, now they make a public appearance from the press, is, that they are designed to cultivate the same sacred principle, and to promote the same excellent practice.

Long, Madam, may you bloom in all the vivacity and amiableness of youth, like the charming subject of one of these Contemplations. But at the same time remember, that, with regard to such inferior accomplishments, you must one day fade, (may it prove some very remote period!) like the mournful

objects of the other. This consideration will prompt you to go on, as you have begun, in adding the meekness of wisdom, and all the beauties of holiness, to the graces of an engaging person, and the refinements of a polite education.

And might—O! might the ensuing hints furnish you with the least assistance in prosecuting so desirable an end; might they contribute, in any degree, to establish your faith, or elevate your devotion; they would, then, administer to the author such a satisfaction, as applause cannot give, nor censure take away; a satisfaction, which I should be able to enjoy, even in those awful moments, when all that captivates the eye is sinking in darkness, and every glory of this world disappearing for ever.

These wishes, Madam, as they are a most agreeable employ of my thoughts, so they come attended with this additional circumstance of pleasure, that they are also the sincerest expression of that very great esteem with which

I am, Madam,

Your most obedient,

Most humble servant,

JAMES HERVEY

Weston-Favel, near Northampton,
May 20, 1746.

PREFACE.

THE first of these occasional Meditations begs leave to remind my readers of their latter end; and would invite them to set, not their houses only, but, which is inexpressibly more needful, their souls, in order; that they may be able, through all the intermediate stages, to look forward upon their approaching exit without any anxious apprehensions; and, when the great change commences, may bid adieu to terrestrial things, with all the calmness of a cheerful resignation, with all the comforts of a well-grounded faith.

The other attempts to sketch out some little traces of the all-sufficiency of our Redeemer for the grand and gracious purposes of everlasting salvation; that a sense of his unutterable dignity, and infinite perfections, may incite us to regard him with sentiments of the most profound veneration; to long for an assured interest in his merits with all the ardency of desire; and to trust in his powerful mediation, with an affiance not to be shaken by any temptations, not to be shared with any performances of our own.

I flatter myself, that the thoughts conceived among the tombs may be welcome to the serious and humane mind; because, as there are few who have not consigned the remains of some dear relations, or honoured friends, to those silent repositories; so there are none, but must be sensible, that this is the

house appointed for all living; and that they themselves are shortly to remove into the same solemn mansions. And who would not turn aside for a while, from the most favourite amusements, to view the place where his once-loved companions lie? Who would not sometimes survey those apartments, where he himself is to take up an abode, till time shall be no more?

As to the other little essay, may I not humbly presume, that the very subject itself will recommend the remarks? For, who is not delighted with the prospect of the blooming creation, and even charmed with the delicate attractions of flowers? Who does not covet to assemble them in the garden, or wear them in a nosegay? Since this is a passion so universal, who would not be willing to render it productive of the sublimest improvement? This piece o holy frugality I have ventured to suggest, and endea voured to exemplify, in the second letter; that, while the hand is cropping the transient glories of a flowe1. the attentive mind may be enriching itself with solid and lasting good. And I cannot but entertain some pleasing hopes, that the nicest taste may receive and relish religious impressions, when they are conveyed by such lovely monitors; when the instructive lessons are found, not on the leaves of some formidable folio, but stand legible on the fine sarcenet of a narcissus; when they savour not of the lamp and recluse, but come breathing from the fragant bosom of a jonquil.

SKETCH

OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.

JAMES HERVEY was born at Hardingstone, a village one mile from Northampton, on February 26, 1713-14. His father, who was minister of the parish of Collingtree, sent him to the free grammar-school at Northampton; and next to Lincoln-college, Oxford, where he took his bachelor's degree. In 1736 he left Oxford and became curate to his father, and next at Dummer, in Hampshire: from whence he went to Bideford, in Devonshire, where he continued about five years, and was much liked by the parishioners. At this place he wrote his celebrated 'Meditations among the Tombs,' and 'Reflections in a Flower-Garden.' In 1743, he returned to Northamptonshire, and officiated as curate to his father, who was now rector of Weston-Favel, and whom he succeeded in that living and Collingtree, in 1752; on which occasion he took his master's degree at Cambridge. His principles were Calvinistic, but his piety was of the most cheerful and useful description. He died on Christmas-day, 1758. Besides his Meditations, in 2 vols. he published 'Theron and Aspasio; or, a Series of Dialogues and Letters,' 3 vols.; Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke; and some Sermons. After his death appeared his Life and Letters, 2 vols.; Eleven Letters to Wesley; Letters to Lady Shirley; and Miscellaneous Letters.

With equal dignity, now see him rise
To paint the sable horrors of the skies:
When all the wide horizon lies in shade;
And midnight phantoms sweep along the glade:
All nature hush'd—a solemn silence reigns,
And scarce a breeze disturbs the sleeping plains.
Last, yet not less, in majesty of phrase,
He draws the full-orb'd moon's expansive blaze;
The waving meteors, trembling from on high,
With all the mute artill'ry of the sky:
Systems on systems, which in order roll,
And dart their lambent beams from pole to pole.
Hail, mighty genius! whose excursive soul
No bounds confine, no limits can control:
Whose eye expatiates, and whose mind can rove,
Through earth, through ether, and the realms above
From things inanimate can direct the rod,
In just gradation, to ascend to God.
Taught by thy lines, see hoary age grow wise,
And all the rebel in his bosom dies:
E'en thoughtless youth in luxury of blood,
Fly the infectious world, and dare—be good:
Thy sacred truths shall reach th' impervious heart;
Discord shall cease, disease forget to smart;
E'en malice love, and calumny commend;
Pride beg an alms, and av'rice turn a friend.
Centered in Christ, who fires the soul within,
The flesh shall know no pain; the soul no sin;
E'en in the terrors of expiring breath,
We bless the friendly stroke, and live—in death.

Oxford, April 28, 1748.

VERSES

TO MR. HERVEY, ON HIS MEDITATIONS.

In these lov'd scenes, what rapt'rous graces shine,
Live in each leaf, and breathe in ev'ry line!
What sacred beauties beam throughout the whole,
To charm the sense, and steal upon the soul!
In classic elegance, and thoughts—his own,
We see our faults as in a mirror shown:
Each truth, in glaring characters exprest,
All own the twin resemblance in their breast:
His easy periods, and persuasive page,
At once amend, and entertain the age:
Nature's wide fields all open to his view,
He charms the mind with something ever new:
On fancy's pinions his advent'rous soul
Wantons unbounded, and pervades the whole:
From death's dark caverns in the earth below,
To spheres, where planets roll, or comets glow.
  See him explore, with more than human eyes,
The dreary sepulchre, where Granville lies:
Converse with stones, or monumental brass,
The rude inscriptions,—or the painted glass,
To gloomy vaults descend with awful tread,
And view the silent mansions of the dead.
  To gayer scenes he next adapts his lines,
Where lavish'd nature in embroid'ry shines:
The jess'mine groves, the woodbine's fragrant bow'rs,
With all the painted family of flow'rs:
There, Sacharissa! in each fleeting grace,
Read all the transient honours of thy face.

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MEDITATIONS
AMONG THE TOMBS.

IN A LETTER TO A LADY.

MADAM,

TRAVELLING lately into Cornwall, I happened to alight at a considerable village in that county; where, finding myself under an unexpected necessity of staying a little, I took a walk to the church.* The doors, like the heaven to which they lead, were wide open, and readily admitted an unworthy stranger. Pleased with the opportunity, I resolved to spend a few minutes under the sacred roof.

In a situation so retired and awful, I could not avoid falling into a train of meditations, serious and mournfully pleasing; which, I trust, were in some degree profitable to me, while they possessed and warmed my thoughts: and, if they may administer any satisfaction to you, madam, now they are recol-

* I had named, in some former editions, a particular church, viz. Kilkhampton; where several of the monuments, described in the following pages, really exist. But as I thought it convenient to mention some cases here which are not according to the best of my remembrance, referred to in any inscriptions there: I have now omitted the name, that imagination might operate more freely, and the improvement of the reader be consulted, without any thing that should look like a variation from truth and fact.

lected, and committed to writing, I shall receive a fresh pleasure from them.

It was an ancient pile: reared by hands that, ages ago, were mouldered into dust. Situate in the centre of a large burial-ground; remote from all the noise and hurry of tumultuous life; the body spacious; the structure lofty; the whole magnificently plain. A row of regular pillars extended themselves through the midst; supporting the roof with simplicity, and with dignity. The light, that passed through the windows, seemed to shed a kind of luminous obscurity, which gave every object a grave and venerable air. The deep silence, added to the gloomy aspect, and both heightened by the loneliness of the place, greatly increased the solemnity of the scene. A sort of religious dread stole insensibly upon my mind, while I advanced, all pensive and thoughtful, along the inmost aisle: such a dread, as hushed every ruder passion, and dissipated all the gay images of an alluring world.

Having adored that Eternal Majesty, who, far from being confined to temples made with hands, has heaven for his throne, and the earth for his footstool, I took particular notice of a handsome altar-piece; presented, as I was afterwards informed, by the master-builders of Stow;* out of gratitude, I presume, to that gracious God, who carried them through their work, and enabled them to 'bring forth their topstone with joy.'

* The name of a grand seat, belonging to the late Earl of Bath; remarkable formerly for its excellent workmanship and elegant furniture; once the principal resort of the quality and gentry of the west; but now demolished, laid even with the ground, and scarce one stone left upon another: so that corn may grow, or nettles spring, where Stow lately stood.

Oh! how amiable is gratitude! especially when it has the Supreme Benefactor for its object. I have always looked upon gratitude as the most exalted principle that can actuate the heart of man. It has something noble, disinterested, and (if I may be allowed the term) generously devout. Repentance indicates our nature fallen, and prayer turns chiefly upon a regard to one's self. But the exercises of gratitude subsisted in Paradise, when there was no fault to deplore; and will be perpetuated in heaven, when 'God shall be all in all.'

The language of this sweet temper is, 'I am unspeakably obliged: what return shall I make?' And surely, it is no improper expression of an unfeigned thankfulness, to decorate our Creator's courts, and beautify 'the place where his honour dwelleth.' Of old, the habitation of his feet was glorious: let it not, now, be sordid or contemptible. It must grieve an ingenuous mind, and be a reproach to any people, to have their own houses wainscotted with cedar, and painted with vermilion; while the temple of the Lord of hosts is destitute of every decent ornament.

Here I recollected, and was charmed with Solomon's fine address to the Almighty, at the dedication of his famous temple. With immense charge, and exquisite skill, he had erected the most rich and finished structure, that the sun ever saw. Yet upon a review of his work, and a reflection on the transcendent perfections of the Godhead, how he exalts the one, and abases the other! The building was too glorious for the mightiest monarch to inhabit; too sacred, for unhallowed feet even to enter; yet, infinitely too mean for the Deity to reside in. It was, and the royal worshipper acknowledged it to be, a

most marvellous vouchsafement in uncreated Excellency, to 'put his name there.' The whole passage breathes such a delicacy, and is animated with such a sublimity of sentiment, that I cannot persuade myself to pass on, without repeating it. 'But will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold! the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded!'* Incomparable saying! worthy the wisest of men. Who would not choose to possess such an elevated devotion, rather than to own all the glittering materials of that sumptuous edifice?

We are apt to be struck with admiration at the stateliness and grandeur of a masterly performance in architecture. And, perhaps, on a sight of the ancient sanctuary, should have made the superficial observation of the disciples; 'What manner of stones, and what buildings are here?' But what a nobler turn of thought, and juster taste of things, does it discover, to join with Israel's king, in celebrating the condescension of the Divine Inhabitant! that the High and Lofty One, who fills immensity with his glory, should, in a peculiar manner, fix his abode there! should there manifest an extraordinary degree of his benedictive presence; permit sinful mortals to approach his majesty; and promise 'to make them joyful in his house of prayer!' This should more sensibly affect our hearts, than the most curious arrangenent of stones can delight our eyes.

Nay, the everlasting God does not disdain to dwell in our souls by his Holy Spirit; and to make even our bodies his temple. Tell me, ye that frame critical judgments, and balance nicely the distinction of

* 1 Kings viii. 27.

things; 'is this most astonishing, or most rejoicing?' He humbleth himself, the Scripture assures us, even to behold the things that are in heaven.* 'Tis a most condescending favour, if he pleases to take the least approving notice of angels and archangels, when they bow down in homage from their celestial thrones. Will he then graciously regard, will he be united, to poor, polluted, breathing dust? Unparalleled honour! Invaluable privilege! Be this my portion, and I shall not covet crowns, nor envy conquerors.

But let me remember, what a sanctity of disposition, and uprightness of conversation, so exalted a relation demands: remember this, 'and rejoice with trembling.' Durst I commit any iniquity, while I tread these hallowed courts? Could the Jewish High Priest allow himself in any known transgression, while he made that solemn yearly entrance† into the Holy of Holies, and stood before the immediate presence of Jehovah? No, truly. In such circumstances, a thinking person must shudder at the most remote solicitation to any wilful offence. I should now be shocked at the least indecency of behaviour, and am apprehensive of every appearance of evil. And why do we not carry this holy jealousy into all our ordinary life? Why do we not, in every place, reverence ourselves; as persons dedicated to the Divinity, as living temples of the Godhead? For, if we are real, and not merely nominal Christians, the God of glory, according to his own promise,‡ dwells in us, and walks in us. O! that this one doctrine of our religion might operate, with an abiding efficacy, upon our consciences! It would be instead of a thousand laws, to regulate our conduct; instead of a thousand mo-

* Psal. cxiii. 6. † Heb. ix. 7. ‡ 2 Cor. vi. 16.

tives, to quicken us in holiness. Under the influence of such a conviction, we should study to maintain a purity of intention; a dignity of action; and to walk worthy of that transcendently majestic Being, who admits us to a fellowship with himself, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

The next thing, which engaged my attention, was the lettered floor. The pavement, somewhat like Ezekiel's roll, was written over from one end to the other. I soon perceived the comparison to hold good in another respect; and the inscriptions to be matter of 'mourning, lamentation, and woe.'* They seemed to court my observation; silently inviting me to read them. And what would these dumb monitors inform me of? 'That, beneath their little circumferences, were deposited such and such pieces of clay, which once lived, and moved, and talked: that they had received a charge to preserve their names, and were the remaining trustees of their memory.'

Ah! said I, is such my situation? The adorable Creator around me, and the bones of my fellow-creatures under me! Surely, then, I have great reason to cry out with the revering patriarch, how dreadful is this place!† Seriousness and devotion become this house for ever. May I never enter it lightly or irreverently; but with a profound awe, and godly fear!

O! that they were wise!‡ said the inspired penman. It was his last wish for his dear people. He breathed it out, and gave up the ghost. But what is wisdom? It consists not in refined speculations, accurate researches into nature, or an universal acquaintance with history. The divine lawgiver settles this important point, in his next aspiration: O! that they

* Ezek. ii. 10. † Gen. xxviii. 17 ‡ Deut. xxxii. 29.

understood this! that they had right apprehensions of their spiritual interest and eternal concerns! that they had eyes to discern, and inclinations to pursue, the things which belong to their peace! But how shall they attain this valuable knowledge? I send them not, adds the illustrious teacher, to turn over all the volumes of literature: they may acquire, and much more expeditiously, this science of life, by considering their latter end. This spark of heaven is often lost, under the glitter of pompous erudition; but shines clearly in the gloomy mansions of the tomb. drowned in this gentle whisper, amidst the noise of secular affairs; but speaks distinctly in the retirement of serious contemplation. Behold! how providentially I am brought to the school of wisdom!* The grave is the most faithful master; and these instances of mortality the most instructive lessons. Come then, calm attention, and compose my thoughts; come, thou celestial Spirit, and enlighten my mind; that I may so peruse these awful pages, as to become 'wise unto salvation.'

Examining the records of mortality, I found the memorials of a promiscuous multitude. They were huddled, at least they rested together, without any regard to rank or seniority. None were ambitious of the uppermost rooms, or chief seats, in this house of mourning. None entertained fond and eager expectations of being honourably greeted, in their

* The man how wise, who, sick of gaudy scenes,
Is led by choice to take his fav'rite walk
Beneath death's gloomy, silent, cypress shades,
Unpierced by vanity's fantastic ray!
To read his monuments, to weigh his dust,
Visit his vaults, and dwell among the tombs!
Night Thoughts.

darksome cells. The man of years and experience, reputed as an oracle in his generation, was content to lie down at the feet of a babe. In this house appointed for all living, the servant was equally accommodated, and lodged in the same story with his master. The poor indigent lay as softly, and slept as soundly, as the most opulent possessor. All the distinction that subsisted, was, a grassy hillock, bound with osiers; or a sepulchral stone, ornamented with imagery.

Why then, said my working thoughts, O! why should we raise such a mighty stir about superiority and precedence; when the next remove will reduce us all to a state of equal meanness? Why should we exalt ourselves, or debase others; since we must all, one day, be upon a common level, and blended together in the same undistinguished dust? O! that this consideration might humble my own and others' pride, and sink our imaginations as low, as our habitations will shortly be!

Among these confused relics of humanity, there are, without doubt, persons of contrary interests, and contradicting sentiments. But death, like some able Daysman, has laid his hand on the contending parties; and brought all their differences to an amiable conclusion. Here enemies, sworn enemies, dwell together in unity. They drop every imbittered thought, and forget that they once were foes. Perhaps their crumbling bones mix, as they moulder: and those who, while they lived, stood aloof in irreconcileable variance, here fall into mutual embraces, and even incorporate with each other in the grave. O! that we might learn from these friendly ashes, not to perpetuate the memory of injuries, not to fo-

ment the fever of resentment, nor cherish the turbulence of passion; that there may be as little animosity and disagreement in the land of the living, as there is in the congregation of the dead! But I suspend for a while such general observations, and address myself to a more particular inquiry.

Yonder white stone, emblem of the innocence it covers, informs the beholder of one, who breathed out its tender soul, almost in the instant of receiving it. There, the peaceful infant, without so much as knowing what labour and vexation mean, 'lies still and is quiet; it sleeps and is at rest.'* Staying only to wash away its native impurity in the laver of regeneration, it bid a speedy adieu to time, and terrestrial things. What did the little hasty sojourner find so forbidding and disgustful in our upper world, to occasion its precipitant exit? 'Tis written, indeed, of its suffering Saviour, that when he had tasted the vinegar mingled with gall, he would not drink.† And did our new-come stranger begin to sip the cup of life; but, perceiving the bitterness, turn away its head, and refuse the draught? Was this the cause, why the wary babe only opened its eyes; just looked on the light; and then withdrew into the more inviting regions of undisturbed repose?

Happy voyager! no sooner launched, than arrived at the haven! But more eminently happy they, who have passed the waves, and weathered all the storms of a troublesome and dangerous world! who, 'through many tribulations, have entered into the kingdom of heaven;' and thereby brought honour to their divine Convoy, administered comfort to the

* Job iii. 1 † Matt. xxvii. 34.

companions of their toil, and left an instructive example to succeeding pilgrims.

Highly favoured probationer! accepted, without being exercised! It was thy peculiar privilege, not to feel the slightest of those evils, which oppress thy surviving kindred; which frequently fetch groans from the most manly fortitude, or most elevated faith. The arrows of calamity, barbed with anguish, are often fixed deep in our choicest comforts. The fiery darts of temptation, shot from the hand of hell, are always flying in showers around our integrity. To thee, sweet babe, both these distresses and dangers are alike unknown.

Consider this, ye mourning parents, and dry up your tears. Why should you lament that your little ones are crowned with victory, before the sword is drawn, or the conflict begun? Perhaps the Supreme Disposer of events foresaw some inevitable snare of temptation forming, or some dreadful storm of adversity impending. And why should you be so dissatisfied with that kind precaution; which housed your pleasant plant, and removed into shelter a tender flower, before the thunders roared; before the lightnings flew; before the tempest poured its rage? O remember! they are not lost, but taken away from the evil to come.*

At the same time, let survivors, doomed to bear the heat and burden of the day, for their encouragement reflect, that it is more honourable to have entered the lists, and to have fought the good fight, before they come off conquerors. They who have borne the cross, and submitted to afflictive providences, with a cheerful resignation; have girded up

* Isa. lvii. 1.

the loins of their mind, and performed their Master's will, with an honest and persevering fidelity; these, having glorified their Redeemer on earth, will, probably, be as stars of the first magnitude in heaven. They will shine with brighter beams, be replenished with stronger joys, in their Lord's everlasting kingdom.

Here lies the grief of a fond mother, and the blasted expectation of an indulgent father. The youth grew up, like a well-watered plant; he shot deep, rose high, and bid fair for manhood. But just as the cedar began to tower, and promised, ere long, to be the pride of the wood, and prince among the neighbouring trees—behold! the axe is laid unto the root; the fatal blow struck; and all its branching honours tumbled to the dust. And did he fall alone? No, the hopes of his father that begat him, and the pleasing prospects of her that bare him, fell, and were crushed together with him.

Doubtless, it would have pierced one's heart, to have beheld the tender parents, following the breathless youth to his long home. Perhaps, drowned in tears, and all overwhelmed with sorrows, they stood, like weeping statues, on this very spot. Methinks, I see the deeply-distressed mourners attending the sad solemnity. How they wring their hands, and pour floods from their eyes! Is it fancy? or do I really hear the passionate mother, in an agony of affliction, taking the final leave of the darling of her soul? Dumb she remained, while the awful obsequies were performing; dumb with grief, and leaning upon the partner of her woes. But now the inward anguish struggles for vent; it grows too big to be repressed. She advances to the brink of the

grave. All her soul is in her eyes. She fastens one more look upon the dear doleful object, before the pit shuts its mouth upon him. And as she looks, she cries,—in broken accents, interrupted by many a rising sob, she cries—'Farewell, my son! my son! my only beloved! would to God I had died for thee! Farewell, my child; and farewell all my earthly happiness! I shall never more see good, in the land of the living. Attempt not to comfort me. I will go mourning, all my days, till my gray hairs come down, with sorrow, to the grave.'

From this afflicting representation, let parents be convinced, how highly it concerns them to cultivate the morals, and secure the immortal interests of their children. If you really love the offspring of your own bodies; If your bowels yearn over those amiable pledges of conjugal endearment; spare no pains, give all diligence, I entreat you, to 'bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;' then, may you have joy in their life, or consolation in their death. If their span is prolonged, their unblameable and useful conduct will be the staff of your age, and a balm for declining nature. Or, if the number of their years be cut off in the midst; you may commit their remains to the dust, with much the same comfortable expectations, as you send the survivors to places of genteel education. You may commit them to the dust, with cheering hopes of receiving them again to your arms, inexpressibly improved in every noble and endearing accomplishment.

'Tis certainly a severe trial; and much more afflictive than I am able to imagine: to resign a lovely blooming creature, sprung from your own loins, to the gloomy recesses of corruption. Thus to resign

him, after having been long dandled upon your knees, united to your affections by a thousand ties of tenderness, and now become both the delight of your eyes, and the support of your family! To have such a one torn from your bosom, and thrown into darkness; doubtless, it must be like a dagger in your hearts. But O! how much more cutting to you, and confounding to the child, to have the soul separated from God; and, for shameful ignorance, or early impiety, transmitted to places of eternal torment! How would it aggravate your distress, and add a distracting emphasis to all your sighs, if you should follow the pale corpse with these bitter reflections! 'This dear creature, though long ago capable of knowing good from evil, is gone out of the world, before it had learned the great design of coming into it. A short-lived momentary existence, it received from me; but no good instructions, no holy admonitions, nothing to further its well-being in that everlasting state, upon which it is now entered. The poor body is consigned to the coffin, and carried out to consume away in the cold and silent grave. And what reason have I to suppose, that the precious soul is in a better condition? May I not justly fear, that, sentenced by the righteous Judge, it is going, or gone away, into the plains of endless punishment? Perhaps, while I am bewailing its untimely departure, it may be cursing, in outer darkness, that ever to be deplored, that most calamitous day, when it was born of such a careless, ungodly parent as I have been.'

Nothing, I think, but the gnawings of that worm which never dies, can equal the anguish of these self-condemning thoughts. The tortures of a rack must be an easy suffering, compared with the stings

and horrors of such a remorse. How earnestly do I wish, that as many as are intrusted with the management of children, would take timely care to prevent these scourges of conscience; by endeavouring to conduct their minds into an early knowledge of Christ, and a cordial love of his truth!

On this hand is lodged one, whose sepulchral stone tells a most pitiable tale indeed! Well may the little images, reclined over the sleeping ashes, hang down their heads with that pensive air! None can consider so mournful a story, without feeling some touches of sympathizing concern. His age twenty-eight; his death sudden; himself cut down in the prime of life, amidst all the vivacity and vigour of manhood; while 'his breasts were full of milk, and his bones moistened with marrow.' Probably he entertained no apprehensions of the evil hour. And indeed who could have suspected, that so bright a sun should go down at noon? To human appearance, his hill stood strong. Length of days seemed written in his sanguine countenance. He solaced himself with the prospect of a long, long series of earthly satisfactions. When lo! an unexpected stroke descends! descends from that mighty arm, which 'overturneth the mountains by their roots; and crushes the imaginary hero, before the moth;'* as quickly, and more easily, than our fingers press such a feeble fluttering insect to death.

Perhaps, the nuptial joys were all he thought on. Were not such the breathings of his enamoured soul? 'Yet a very little while, and I shall possess the utmost of my wishes. I shall call my charmer mine; and, in her, enjoy whatever my heart can crave.'

* Job iv. 19.

In the midst of such enchanting views, had some faithful friend but softly reminded him of an opening grave, and the end of all things; how unseasonable would he have reckoned the admonition! Yet, though all warm with life, and rich in visionary bliss, he was even then tottering upon the brink of both. Dreadful vicissitude! to have the bridal festivity turned into the funeral solemnity! Deplorable misfortune! to be shipwrecked in the very haven! and to perish even in sight of happiness! What a memorable proof is here of the frailty of man, in his best estate! Look, O! look on this monument, ye gay and careless! Attend to this date; and boast no more of to-morrow!

Who can tell, but the bride-maids, girded with gladness, had prepared the marriage-bed? had decked it with the richest covers, and dressed it in pillows of down? When—oh! trust not in youth, or strength, or in any thing mortal; for there is nothing certain, nothing to be depended on, beneath the unchangeable God—Death, relentless Death, is making him another kind of bed in the dust of the earth. Unto this he must be conveyed, not with a splendid procession of joyous attendants; but stretched in the gloomy hearse, and followed by a train of mourners. On this he must take up a lonely lodging, nor ever be released, 'till the heavens are no more.' In vain does the consenting fair one put on her ornaments, and expect her spouse. Did she not, like Sicera's mother, look out of the lattice; chide the delays of her beloved; and wonder 'why his chariot was so long in coming?' little thinking, that the intended bridegroom had for ever done with transitory things! that now everlasting cares employ his mind, without

one single remembrance of his lovely Lucinda! Go, disappointed virgin! go, mourn the uncertainty of all created bliss! Teach thy soul to aspire after a sure and immutable felicity! For the once gay and gallant Fidelio sleeps in other embraces; even in the icy arms of death! forgetful, eternally forgetful of the world and thee!

Hitherto, one is tempted to exclaim against the king of terrors, and call him capriciously cruel. He seems, by beginning at the wrong end of the register, to have inverted the laws of nature. Passing over the couch of decrepit age, he has nipped infancy in its bud; blasted youth in its bloom; and torn up manhood in its full maturity. Terrible indeed are these providences, yet not unsearchable the counsels:

For us they sicken, and for us they die.*

Such strokes must not only grieve the relatives, but surprise the whole neighbourhood. They sound a powerful alarm to heedless dreaming mortals, and are intended as a remedy for our carnal security. Such passing-bells inculcate loudly our Lord's admonition; 'Take ye heed, watch, and pray: for ye know not when the time is.' We nod, like intoxicated creatures, upon the very verge of a tremendous precipice. These astonishing dispensations are the kind messengers of heaven, to rouse us from our supineness, and quicken us into timely circumspection. I need not, surely, accommodate them with language, nor act as their interpreter. Let every one's conscience be awake, and this will appear their awful meaning; 'O! ye sons of men, in the midst of life

* Night Thoughts.

you are in death. No state, no circumstances can ascertain your preservation a single moment. So strong is the tyrant's arm, that nothing can resist its force; so true his aim, that nothing can elude the blow. Sudden as lightning, sometimes, is his arrow launched: and wounds, and kills, in the twinkling of an eye. Never promise yourselves safety in any expedient, but constant preparation. The fatal shafts fly so promiscuously, that none can guess the next victim. Therefore, be ye always ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the final summons cometh.'

Be ye always ready: for in such an hour as ye think not—Important admonition! Methinks, it reverberates from sepulchre to sepulchre; and addresses me with line upon line, precept upon precept. The reiterated warning, I acknowledge, is too needful; may co-operating grace render it effectual! The momentous truth, though worthy to be engraved on the tables of a most tenacious memory, is but slightly sketched on the transient flow of passion. We see our neighbours fall; we turn pale at the shock; and feel, perhaps, a trembling dread. No sooner are they removed from our sight; but, driven in the whirl of business, or lulled in the languors of pleasure, we forget the providence, and neglect its errand. The impression made on our unstable minds is like the trace of an arrow through the penetrated air, or the path of a keel in the furrowed wave. Strange stupidity! To cure it, another monitor bespeaks me from a neighbouring stone. It contains the narrative of an unhappy mortal, snatched from his friends, and hurried to the awful bar, without leisure, either to take a last farewell of the one, or to put up so much as a single prayer preparatory for the other: killed,

according to the usual expression, by a sudden stroke of casualty.

Was it then a random stroke? Doubtless, the blow came from an aiming, though invisible hand. God presideth over the armies of heaven; God ruleth among the inhabitants of the earth; and God conducteth what men call Chance. Nothing, nothing comes to pass through a blind and undiscerning fatality. If accidents happen, they happen according to the exact foreknowledge, and conformably to the determinate counsels of Eternal Wisdom. The Lord, with whom are the issues of death, signs the warrant, and gives the high commission. The seemingly fortuitous disaster is only the agent or the instrument, appointed to execute the supreme decree. When the king of Israel was mortally wounded, it seemed to be a casual shot. A certain man drew a bow at a venture.* At a venture, as he thought: but his hand was strengthened by an omnipotent aid, and the shaft levelled by an unerring eye. So that, what we term casualty, is really providence; accomplishing deliberate designs, but concealing its own interposition. How comforting this reflection! Admirably adapted to soothe the throbbing anguish of the mourners, and compose their spirits into a quiet submission! Excellently suited to dissipate the fears of godly survivors, and create a calm intrepidity even amidst innumerable perils!

How thin is the partition between this world and another! How short the transition from time to eternity! The partition, nothing more than the breath in our nostrils; and the transition may be made in the twinkling of an eye. Poor Chremylus, I remember,

* 1 Kings xxii. 34.

arose from the diversion of a card-table, and dropt into the dwellings of darkness. One night, Corinna was all gaiety in her spirits, all finery in her apparel, at a magnificent ball. The next night, she lay pale and stiff, an extended corpse, and ready to be mingled with the mouldering dead. Young Atticus lived to see his ample and commodious seat completed: but not to spend one joyous hour under the stately roof. The sashes were hung to admit the day; but the master's eyes are closed in endless night. The apartments were furnished, to invite society, or administer repose; but their lord rests in the lower parts of the earth, in the solitary, silent chambers of the tomb. The gardens were planned, and a thousand elegant decorations designed; but alas! their intended possessor is gone down to 'the place of skulls;' is gone down to the valley of the shadow of death.

While I am recollecting, many, I question not, are experiencing the same tragical vicissitude. The eyes of that sublime Being, who sits upon the circle of the earth, and views all its inhabitants with one comprehensive glance, even now beholds many tents in affliction—such affliction, as overwhelmed the Egyptians in that fatal night, when the destroying angel sheathed his arrows in all the pride of their strength:—some, sinking to the floor from their easy chair, and deaf even amidst the piercing shrieks of their distracted relations:—some giving up the ghost, as they sit retired, or lie reclined under the shady arbour, to taste the sweets of the flowery scene:—some, as they sail, associated with a party of pleasure, along the dancing stream, and through the laughing meads. Nor is the grim intruder mollified,

though wine and music flow around:—some intercepted, as they are returning home; and some interrupted, as they enter upon an important negotiation:—some arrested with the gain of injustice in their hands; and some surprised, in the very act of lewdness, or the attempt of cruelty.

Legions, legions of disasters, such as no prudence can foresee, and no care prevent, lie in wait to accomplish our doom. A starting horse may throw his rider; may at once dash his body against the stones, and fling his soul into the invisible world. A stack of chimneys may tumble into the street, and crush the unwary passenger under the ruins. Even a single tile, dropping from the roof, may be as fatal as the fall of the whole structure. So frail, so very attenuated is the thread of life, that it not only bursts before the storm, but breaks even at a breeze. The most common occurrences, those from which we suspect not the least harm, may prove the weapons of our destruction. A grape-stone, a despicable fly, may be more mortal than Goliah with all his formidable armour. Nay, if God give command, our very comforts become killing. The air we breathe, is our bane; and the food we eat, the vehicle of death. That last enemy has unnumbered avenues for his approach; yea, lies intrenched in our very bosom, and holds his fortress in the seat of our life. The crimson fluid, which distributes health, is impregnated with the seeds of death. Heat may inflame it, or toil oppress it; and make it destroy the parts it was designed to cherish. Some unseen impediment may obstruct its passage, or some unknown violence may divert its course; in either of which cases, it acts the part of a poisonous draught, or a deadly stab.

Ah! in what perils is vain life engag'd!
What slight neglects, what trivial faults destroy
The hardiest frame Of indolence, of toil
We die; of want, of superfluity.
The all-surrounding heav'n, the vital air,
Is big with death.

Since then we are so liable to be dispossessed of this earthly tabernacle, let us look upon ourselves only as tenants at will; and hold ourselves in perpetual readiness, to depart at a moment's warning. Without such an habitual readiness, we are like wretches that sleep on the top of a mast, while a horrid gulf yawns, or furious waves rage, below. And where can be the peace, what the satisfaction, of such a state? Whereas, a prepared condition will inspire a cheerfulness of temper, not to be dismayed by any alarming accident; and create a firmness of mind, not to be overthrown by the most threatening dangers. When the city is fortified with walls, furnished with provision, guarded by able and resolute troops; what have the inhabitants to fear? what may they not enjoy? So, just so, or rather by a much surer band, are connected the real taste of life, and the constant thought of death.

I said, 'Our very comforts may become killing.' —And see the truth inscribed by the hand, sealed with the signet, of fate. The marble, which graces yonder pillar, informs me, that, near it, are deposited the remains of Sophronia, the much-lamented Sophronia, who died in childbed. How often does this calamity happen! The branch shoots; but the stem withers. The babe springs to light; but she that bare him, breathes her last. She gives life, but gives it (O pitiable consideration!) at the expense of her own; and becomes, at once, a mother, and a corpse.

Or else, perhaps, she expires in severe pangs, and is herself a tomb for her infant; while the melancholy complaint of a monarch's woe is the epitaph for them both: 'The children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth.'* Less to be lamented, in my opinion, this misfortune, than the other. Better for the tender stranger to be stopped in the porch; than to enter, only to converse with affliction. Better, to find a grave in the womb, than to be exposed on a hazardous world; without the guardian of its infantile years, without the faithful guide of its youth.

This monument is distinguished by its finer materials, and more delicate appendages. It seems to have taken its model from an affluent hand; directed by a generous heart; which thought it could never do enough for the deceased. It seems, also, to exhibit an emblematical picture of Sophronia's person and accomplishments. Is her beauty, or, what is more than beauty, her white-robed innocence, represented by the snowy colour? the surface, smoothly polished, like her amiable temper and engaging manners? the whole adorned, in a well-judged medium between extravagant pomp and sordid negligence, like her undissembled goodness, remote from the least ostentation, yet in all points exemplary? But ah! how vain were all these endearing charms! How vain the lustre of thy sprightly eye! How vain the bloom of thy bridal youth! How vain the honours of thy superior birth! How unable to secure the lovely possessor from the savage violence of death!—How ineffectual the universal esteem of thy acquaintance, the fondness of thy transported

* Isa. xxxvii. 3.

husband, or even the spotless integrity of thy character, to prolong thy span, or procure thee a short reprieve!—The occurrence of all these circumstances reminds me of those beautiful and tender lines:

> How loved, how valued once, avails thee not;
> To whom related, or by whom begot;
> A heap of dust alone remains of thee:
> 'Tis all thou art!—and all the proud shall be!*
>
> *Pope's Miscell.*

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* These verses are inscribed on a small but elegant monument, lately erected in the great church at Northampton, which, in the hieroglyphical decorations, corresponds with the description introduced above; in this circumstance particularly, that it is dedicated to the memory of an amiable woman, Mrs. Anne Stonhouse, the excellent wife of my worthy friend Dr. Stonhouse, who has seen all the powers of that healing art, to which I and so many others have been greatly indebted, failing in their attempts to preserve a life dearer to him than his own.

> Nec prosunt Domino, quæ prosunt omnibus artes.
>
> No longer his all-healing art avails;
> But ev'ry remedy its master fails.

In the midst of this tender distress, he has sought some kind of consolation, even from the sepulchral marble, by teaching it to speak, at once, his esteem for her memory, and his veneration for that religion which she so eminently adorned. Nor could this be more significantly done, than by summing up her character in that concise but comprehensive sentence, —A sincere Christian: concise enough, to be the motto for a mourning ring; yet as comprehensive as the most enlarged sphere of personal, social, and religious worth. For, whatsoever things are pure; whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report; are they not all included in that grand and noble aggregate, a sincere Christian?

The first lines, considered in such a connexion, are wonderfully plaintive and pathetic:

> How loved, how valued once, avails thee not;
> To whom related, or by whom begot.

They sound, at least in my ears, like the voice of sorrow, mingled with admiration. The speaker seems to have been lost for a while, in melancholy contemplation; suddenly breaks out into this abrupt encomium; then melts into tears, and

Yet, though unable to divert the stroke, Christianity is sovereign to pluck out the sting of death.

can proceed no farther. Yet, in this case how eloquent is silence! While it hints the universal esteem which attended, and the superiority of birth which distinguished, the deceased wife; it expresses, beyond all the pomp of words, the yearning affection, and heart-felt affliction, of the surviving husband. Amidst the group of monumental marbles which are lavish of their panegyric, this, I think, resembles the incomparable address of the painter, who, having placed round a beautiful expiring virgin her friends in all the agonies of grief, represented the unequalled anguish of the father with far greater liveliness and strength, or rather with an inexpressible emphasis, by drawing a veil over his face.

If the last lines are a wide departure from the beaten track of our modern epitaphs, and the very reverse of their high-flown compliments,

A heap of dust alone remains of thee!
'Tis all thou art!—and all the proud shall be!

they are not without a precedent, and one of the most consummate kind, since they breathe the very spirit of that sacred elegy, in which all the heart of the hero and the friend seems to be dissolved: How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished! 2 Sam. i. 27. They remind the reader, of that awful lesson, which was originally dictated by the Supreme Wisdom: Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return, Gen. iii. 19. They inculcate, with all the force of the most convincing evidence, that solemn admonition, delivered by the prophet: Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of! Isa. ii. 22.

That no reader, however inattentive, might mistake the sense and design of this part of the fourth line,

'Tis all thou art!——

it is guarded above and beneath. Above, is an expanded book, that seems to be waved, with an air of triumph, over the emblem of death; which we cannot but suppose to be the volume of inspiration, as it exhibits a sort of abridgment of its whole contents in those animated words: Be ye not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises, Heb. vi. 12. Beneath, that every part might be pregnant with instruction, are those striking reflections, worthy the consideration of the highest proficient in knowledge and piety, yet obvious to the understanding of the most untaught reader: Life, how short! eternity, how long! May my soul learn the forcible purport of this short lesson, In her contracted span of time! and all eternity will not be too long to rejoice in having learned it.

Is not this the silent language of those lamps, which burn, and of that heart, which flames; of those palms, which flourish, and of that crown which glitters, in the well-imitated and gilded marble? Do they not, to the discerning eye, describe the vigilance of her faith; the fervency of her devotion; her victory over the world; and the celestial diadem, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give her at that day?*

How happy the husband, in such a sharer of his bed, and partner of his fortunes! Their inclinations were nicely-tuned unisons, and all their conversation was harmony. How silken the yoke to such a pair, and what blessings were twisted with such bands! every joy was heightened, and every care alleviated. Nothing seemed wanting to consummate their bliss, but a hopeful progeny rising around them; that they might see themselves multiplied in their little ones; see their mingled graces transfused into their offspring; and feel the glow of their affection augmented, by being reflected from their children. 'Grant us this gift,' said their united prayers, 'and our satisfactions are crowned: we request no more.'

Alas! how blind are mortals to future events! How unable to discern what is really good! Give me children, said Rachel, or else I die:† an ardour of impatience altogether unbecoming, and as mistaken as it was unbecoming. She dies, not by the disappointment, but by the accomplishment, of her desire. If children are to parents like a flowery chaplet, whose beauties blossom with ornament, and whose odours breathe delight; death, or some fell misfortune, may find means to entwine themselves

* 2 Tim. iv. 8. † Gen. xxx. 1.

with the lovely wreath. Whenever our souls are poured out, with passionate importunity, after any inferior acquisition, it may be truly said, in the words of our Divine Master, Ye know not what ye ask. Does Providence withhold the thing that we long for? It denies in mercy; and only withholds the occasion of our misery, perhaps the instrument of our ruin. With a sickly appetite, we often loathe what is wholesome, and hanker after our bane. Where imagination dreams of unmingled sweets, there experience frequently finds the bitterness of woe.

Therefore, may we covet immoderately neither this nor that form of earthly felicity; but refer the whole of our condition to the choice of unerring Wisdom. May we learn to renounce our own will, and be ready to make a sacrifice of our warmest wishes, whenever they run counter to the good pleasure of God. For, indeed, as to obey his laws, is to be perfectly free; so, to resign ourselves to his disposal, is to establish our own happiness, and to be secure from fear of evil.

Here, a small and plain stone is placed upon the ground; purchased, one would imagine, from the little fund, and formed by the hand of frugality itself. Nothing costly; not one decoration added; only a very short inscription: and that so effaced, as to be scarcely intelligible. Was the depositary unfaithful to its trust? Or were the letters worn by the frequent resort of the surviving family; to mourn over the grave of a most valuable and beloved relative? For I perceive, upon a closer inspection, that it covers the remains of a father; a religious father, snatched from his growing offspring before they were settled in the world, or so much as their principles fixed by a thorough education.

This, sure, is the most complicated distress that has hitherto come under our consideration. The solemnities of such a dying chamber, are some of the most melting and melancholy scenes imaginable. There lies the affectionate husband; the indulgent parent; the faithful friend; and the generous master. He lies in the last extremities, and on the very point of dissolution. Art has done its all. The raging disease mocks the power of medicine. It hastens, with resistless impetuosity, to execute its dreadful errand; to rend asunder the silver cord of life, and the more delicate tie of social attachment, and conjugal affection.

A servant or two, from a revering distance, cast many a wistful look, and condole their honoured master in the language of sighs. The condescending mildness of his commands was wont to produce an alacrity of obedience, and render their service a pleasure. The remembrance of both imbitters their grief, and makes it trickle plentifully down their honest cheeks. His friends, who have so often shared his joys, and gladdened his mind with their enlivening converse, now are miserable comforters. A sympathizing and mournful pity is all the relief they are able to contribute; unless it be augmented by their silent prayers for the Divine succour, and a word of consolation suggested from the Scriptures.* Those poor innocents, the children, crowd around the bed;

* Texts of Scripture, proper for such an occasion; containing promises of support under affliction, Lam. iii. 32. Heb. xii. 6. 2 Cor. iv. 17.—of pardon, Isa. liii. 5. i. 18. 1 John ii. 1, 2. Acts x. 43.—of justification, Rom. v. 9. viii. 33, 34. 2 Cor. v. 21.—of victory over death. Psal. xxiii. 4. lxxiii. 26. 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.—of a happy resurrection, John vi. 40. 2 Cor. v. 11. Rev. vii. 16, 17.

drowned in tears, and almost frantic with grief, they sob out their little souls, and passionately cry, 'Will he leave us? leave us in a helpless condition! leave us, to an injurious world?'

These separate streams are all united in the distressed spouse, and overwhelm her breast with an impetuous tide of sorrows. In her, the lover weeps; the wife mourns; and all the mother yearns. To her the loss is beyond measure aggravated, by months and years of delightful society, and exalted friendship. Where, alas! can she meet with such unsuspected fidelity, or repose such unreserved confidence? Where find so discreet a counsellor; so improving an example; and a guardian so sedulously attentive to the interests of herself and her children? See! how she hangs over the languishing bed; most tenderly solicitous to prolong a life, important and desirable far beyond her own. Or, if that be impracticable, no less tenderly officious to soothe the last agonies of her dearer self. Her hands, trembling under direful apprehensions, wipe the cold dews from the livid cheeks; and sometimes stay the sinking head on her gentle arms, sometimes rest it on her compassionate bosom. See! how she gazes, with a speechless ardour, on the pale countenance, and meagre features. Speechless her tongue; but she looks unutterable things; while all her soft passions throb with unavailing fondness, and her very soul bleeds with exquisite anguish.

The sufferer, all patient and adoring, submits to the divine will; and, by submission, becomes superior to his affliction. He is sensibly touched with the disconsolate state of his attendants, and pierced with an anxious concern for his wife and his children:

his wife, who will soon be a destitute widow; his children, who will soon be helpless orphans, 'Yet, though cast down, not in despair.' He is greatly refreshed by his trust in the everlasting covenant, and his hope of approaching glory. Religion gives a dignity to distress. At each interval of ease, he comforts his very comforters; and suffers with all the majesty of woe.

The soul, just going to abandon the tottering clay, collects all her force, and exerts her last efforts. The good man raises himself on his pillow; extends a kind hand to his servants, which is bathed in tears; takes an affecting farewell of his friends; clasps his wife in a feeble embrace; kisses the dear pledges of their mutual love; and then pours all that remains of life, and of strength, in the following words:—'I die, my dear children; but, God, the everlasting God, will be with you. Though you lose an earthly parent, you have a Father in heaven, who lives for evermore. Nothing, nothing but an unbelieving heart, and irreligious life, can ever separate you from the regards of his providence—from the endearments of his love.'

He could proceed no farther. His heart was full, but utterance failed. After a short pause, with difficulty, great difficulty, he added: 'You, the dear partner of my soul, you are now the only protector of our orphans. I leave you under a weight of cares. But God, who defendeth the cause of the widow—God, whose promise is faithfulness and truth—God hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* This revives my drooping spirits—let this support the wife of my bosom—and now, O Father of Compassions, into thy hands I commend my spirit—en-

* Heb. xiii. 5.

couraged by thy promised goodness, I leave my fatherless——'

Here, he fainted; fell back upon the bed; and lay for some minutes bereft of his senses. As a taper, upon the very point of extinction, is sometimes suddenly rekindled, and leaps into a quivering flame; so life, before it totally expired, gave a parting struggle, and once more looked abroad from the opening eyelids. He would fain have spoke· fain have uttered the sentence he began. More than once he essayed; but the organs of speech were become like a broken vessel; and nothing but the obstructing phlegm rattled in his throat. His aspect, however, spoke affection inexpressible. With all the father, all the husband still living in his looks, he takes one more view of those dear children, whom he had often beheld with a parental triumph. He turns his dying eyes on that beloved woman, whom he never beheld but with a glow of delight. Fixed in this posture, amidst smiles of love, and under a gleam of heaven, they shine out their last.

Upon this, the silent sorrow bursts into loud laments. They weep, and refuse to be comforted; till some length of time had given vent to the excess of passion, and the consolations of religion had stanched their bleeding woes. Then the afflicted family search for the sentence, which fell unfinished from those loved, those venerable and pious lips. They find it recorded by the prophet Jeremiah, containing the direction of Infinite Wisdom, and the promise of unbounded Goodness; Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.* This, now is the comfort of

* Jerem. xlix. 11.

their life, and the joy of their heart. They treasure it up in their memories. It is the best of legacies, and an inexhaustible fund; a fund which will supply all their wants, by entailing the blessing of heaven on all their honest labours. They are rich, they are happy, in this sacred pledge of the divine favour. They fear no evil; they want no good; because God is their portion, and their guardian God.

No sooner turned from one memento of my own, and memorial of another's decease, but a second, a third, a long succession of these melancholy monitors crowd upon my sight. That which has fixed my observation, is one of a more grave and sable aspect than the former. I suppose it preserves the relics of a more aged person. One would conjecture, that he made somewhat of a figure in his station among the living; as his monument does among the funeral marbles. Let me draw near, and inquire of the stone, 'who, or what, is beneath its surface.' I am informed, he was once the owner of a considerable estate; which was much improved by his own application and management: that he left the world in the busy period of life, advanced a little beyond the meridian.

Probably, replied my musing mind, one of those indefatigable drudges, who rise early, late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness; not to secure the loving-kindness of the Lord; not to make provision for any reasonable necessity; but only to amass together ten thousand times more than they can possibly use. Did he not lay schemes for enlarging his fortune, and aggrandizing his family? Did he not purpose to join field to field, and add house to house; till his possessions were almost as vast as his desires?

That, then, he would sit down, and enjoy what he had acquired; breathe awhile from his toilsome pursuit of things temporal, and perhaps, think a little of things eternal.

But see the folly of worldly wisdom! How silly, how childish, is the sagacity of (what is called) manly and masterly prudence; when it contrives more solicitously for time, than it provides for eternity! How strangely infatuated are those subtle heads, which weary themselves in concerting measures for phantoms of a day; and scarce bestow a thought on everlasting realities! When every wheel moves on smoothly; when all the well-disposed disposed designs are ripening apace for execution; and the long-expected crisis of enjoyment seems to approach; behold! God from on high laughs at the Babel-builder. Death touches the bubble, and it breaks, it drops into nothing. The cobweb, most finely spun indeed, but more easily dislodged, is swept away in an instant; and all the abortive projects are buried in the same grave with their projector. So true is that verdict which the wisdom from above passes on these successful unfortunates: 'They walk in a vain shadow, and disquiet themselves in vain.'*

Speak, ye that attended such a one in his last minutes; ye that heard his expiring sentiments; did he not cry out, in the language of disappointed sensuality—'O death! how terrible is thy approach to a man immersed in secular cares, and void of all concern for the never-ending hereafter! Where, alas! is the profit, where the comfort of entering deep into the knowledge, and of being dextrous in the dis-

* Psal. xxxix. 6.

patch of earthly affairs; since I have all the while neglected the one thing needful! Destructive mistake! I have been attentive to every inferior interest; I have laid myself out on the trifles of a moment; but I have disregarded heaven; have forgot eternal ages O. that my days'—here, he was going on to breathe some fruitless wishes, or to form, I know not what ineffectual resolutions. But a sudden convulsion shook his nerves; disabled his tongue; and, in less than an hour, dissolved his frame.

May the children of this world be warned by the dying words of an unhappy brother, and gather advantage from his misfortune Why should they pant, with such impatient ardour, after white and yellow earth; as if the universe did not afford sufficient for every one to take a little? Why should they lade themselves with thick clay, when they are to 'run for an incorruptible crown, and press towards the prize of their high calling?' Why should they overload the vessel, in which their everlasting all is embarked; or fill their arms with superfluities, wher they are to swim for their lives? Yet, so preposterou is the conduct of those persons, who are all industry to heap up an abundance of the wealth which perisheth, but are scarce so much as faintly desirous of being rich towards God.

O! that we may walk, through all these glittering toys, at least with a wise indifference, if not with a superior disdain! Having enough for the conveniences of life, let us only accommodate ourselves with things below, and lay up our treasures in the regions above. Whereas, if we indulge an anxious concern, or lavish an inordinate care, on any transitory possessions, we shall rivet them to our affections with

so firm an union, that the utmost severity of pain must attend the separating stroke. By such an eager attachment to what will certainly be ravished from us, we shall only insure to ourselves accumulated anguish against the agonizing hour. We shall plant, aforehand, our dying pillow with thorns.*

Some, I perceive, arrived at threescore years and ten before they made their exit; nay, some few resigned not their breath till they had numbered fourscore revolving harvests. These, I would hope, 'remembered their Creator in the days of their youth;' before their strength became labour and sorrow; before that low ebb of languishing nature, when the keepers of the house tremble, and those that look out of the windows are darkened:† when even the lighting down of the grasshopper, is a burden on the bending shoulders; and desire itself fails in the listless, lethargic soul;—before those heavy hours come, and those tiresome moments draw nigh, in which, there is too much reason to say, 'we have no pleasure in them;' no 'improvement from them.'

If their lamps were unfurnished with oil; how unfit must they be, in such decrepit circumstances, to go to the market, and buy!‡ For, besides a variety of disorders, arising from the enfeebled constitution, their corruptions must be surprisingly

* Lean not on earth; 'twill pierce thee to the heart;
A broken reed at best, but oft a spear:
On its sharp point peace bleeds, and hope expires.—*Young.*

† Eccles. xii. 3. 5. I need not remind my reader, that by the former of these figurative expressions, is signified the enervated state of the hands and arms; by the latter, the dimness of the eyes, or the total loss of sight: that, taken in connexion with other parts of the chapter, they exhibit, in a series of bold and lively metaphors, a description of the various infirmities attendant on old age.

‡ Matt. xxv. 9.

strengthened by such a long course of irreligion. Evil habits must have struck the deepest root; must have twisted themselves with every fibre of the heart; and be as thoroughly ingrained in the disposition, as the soot in the Ethiopian's complexion, or the spots in the leopard's skin. If such a one, under such disadvantages, surmounts all the difficulties which lie in his way to glory, it must be a great and mighty salvation indeed. If such a one escapes destruction, and is saved at the last; it must, without all peradventure, be—so as by fire.*

This is the season which stands in need of comfort, and is very improper to enter upon the conflict. The husbandman should now be putting in his sickle, or eating the fruit of his labours; not beginning to break up the ground, or scatter the seed. Nothing, 'tis true, is impossible with God. He said, Let there be light, and there was light; instantaneous light, diffused as quick as thought, through all the dismal dominion of primeval darkness. At his command a leprosy of the longest continuance, and of the utmost inveteracy, departs in a moment. He can, in the greatness of his strength, quicken the wretch who has lain dead in trespasses and sins, not four days only, but forescore years. Yet trust not, O trust not, a point of such inexpressible importance to so dreadful an uncertainty. God may suspend his power; may withdraw his help; may swear in his wrath, that such abuses of his long-suffering shall 'never enter into his rest.'

Ye, therefore, that are vigorous in health and blooming in years, improve the precious opportunity. Improve your golden hours to the noblest of all pur-

* 1 Cor. iii. 15.

poses; such as may render you meet for the inheritance of saints in light; and ascertain your title to a state of immortal youth, to a crown of eternal glory. Stand not, all the prime of your day, idle: trifle no longer with the offers of this immense felicity: but make haste, and delay not the time, to keep God's commandments. While you are loitering in a gay insensibility, death may be bending his bow, and marking you out for speedy victims. Not long ago, I happened to spy a thoughtless jay. The poor bird was idly busied in dressing his pretty plumes, or hopping carelessly from spray to spray. A sportsman coming by observes the feathered rover; immediately he lifts the tube, and levels his blow. Swifter than whirlwind flies the leaden death; and, in a moment, lays the silly creature breathless on the ground. Such, such may be the fate of the man who has a fair occasion of obtaining grace to-day; and wantonly postpones the improvement of it till to-morrow. He may be cut off, in the midst of his folly, and ruined for ever, while he is dreaming of being wise hereafter.

Some, no doubt, came to this their last retreat, full of piety, and full of days; 'as a shock of corn, ripe with age and laden with plenty, cometh in, in his season.'* These were children of light, and wise in their generation; wise with that exalted wisdom which cometh from above, and with that enduring wisdom which lasts to eternity. Rich also they were, more honourably and permanently rich, than all the votaries of Mammon. The wealth of the one has made itself wings, and is irrecoverably gone; while the wretched acquirers are transmitted to that place

* Job v. 28.

of penury and pain, where not so much as one drop of water is allowed to cool their scorched tongues. The stores of the other still abide with them; will never depart from them; but make them glad for ever and ever, in the city of their God. Their treasures were such as no created power could take away, such as none but infinite beneficence can bestow; and (comfortable to consider!) such as I, and every indigent longing sinner, may obtain; treasures of heavenly knowledge and saving faith; treasures of atoning blood and imputed righteousness.

Here lie their bodies in 'peaceable habitations, and quiet resting-places.' Here, they have thrown off every burden, and are escaped from every snare. The head aches no more; the eye forgets to weep; the flesh is no longer racked with acute, nor wasted with lingering distempers. Here, they receive a final release from pain, and an everlasting discharge from sorrow. Here, danger never threatens them with her terrifying alarms; but tranquillity softens their couch, and safety guards their repose. Rest then, ye precious relics, within this hospitable gloom. Rest in gentle slumbers, till the last trumpet shall give the welcome signal; and sound aloud, through all your silent mansions, 'Arise; shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.*

To these, how calm was the evening of life! In what a smiling serenity did their sun go down! When their flesh and their heart failed, how reviving wa the remembrance of an all-sufficient Redeemer, once dying for their sins, now risen again for their justification! How cheering the well-grounded hope of

* Isa. lx. 1.

pardon for their transgressions, and peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! How did this assuage the agonies, and sweeten the bitterness of death? Where now is wealth, with all her golden mountains? Where is honour, with her proud trophies of renown? Where are all the vain pomps of a deluded world? Can they inspire such comfort, can they administer any support, in this last extremity? Can they compose the affrighted thoughts? or buoy up the departing soul, amidst all the pangs of dissolution? The followers of the Lamb seem pleased and triumphant, even at their last gasp. 'God's everlasting arms are underneath'* their fainting heads. His Spirit whispers peace and consolation to their consciences. In the strength of these heavenly succours, they quit the field, not captives but conquerors, with 'hopes full of immortality.'

And now they are gone. The struggles of reluctant nature are over. The body sleeps in death; the soul launches into the invisible state. But, who can imagine the delightful surprise, when they find themselves surrounded by guardian angels, instead of weeping friends? How securely do they wing their way, and pass through unknown worlds, under the conduct of those celestial guides? The vale of tears is quite lost. Farewell, for ever, the realms of woe, and rage of malignant beings! They arrive on the frontiers of inexpressible felicity. They 'are come to the city of the living God:' while a voice sweeter than music in her softest strains, sweet as the harmony of hymning seraphim, congratulates their arrival, and bespeaks their admission Lift up your

* Deut. xxxiii. 27.

heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, that the heirs of glory may enter in.

Here, then, let us leave the spirits and souls of the righteous; escaped from an entangling wilderness, and received into a paradise of delights! Escaped from the territories of disquietude, and settled in regions of unmolested security! Here, they sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their Father. Here they mingle with an innumerable company of angels, and rejoice around the throne of the Lamb: rejoice in the fruition of present felicity, and in the assured expectation of an inconceivable addition to their bliss; when God shall call the heavens from above, and the earth, that he may judge his people.

Fools accounted their life madness, and their end to be without honour: but they are numbered among the children of God; and their lot, their distinguished and eternal lot, is among the saints![*] However, therefore, an undiscerning world may despise, and a profane world vilify, the truly religious; be this the supreme, the invariable desire of my heart: 'Let me live the life and die the death of the righteous. Oh! let my latter end and future state be like theirs!'

What figure is that which strikes my eye from an eminent part of the wall? It is not only placed in a more elevated situation than the rest, but carries a more splendid and sumptuous air than ordinary. Swords and spears, murdering engines and instruments of slaughter, adorn the stone with a formidable magnificence.—It proves to be the monument of a noble warrior.

Is such respect, thought I, paid to the memory of

[*] Wisdom v. 4, 5.

this brave soldier for sacrificing his life to the public good? Then what honours, what immortal honours are due to the great Captain of our salvation? who, though Lord of the angelic legions, and supreme commander of all the heavenly hosts, willingly offered himself a bleeding propitiation for sinners?

The one died, being a mortal, and only yielded up a life which was long before forfeited to divine justice; which must soon have been surrendered as a debt to nature if it had not fallen as a prey to war. But Christ took flesh and gave up the ghost, though he was the great I Am, the fountain of existence, who calls happiness and immortality all his own. He who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, he whose outgoings were from everlasting, even he was made in the likeness of man, and cut off out of the land of the living. Wonder, O heavens! be astonished, O earth! He died the death, of whom it is witnessed, that he is 'the true God and eternal life.'*

The one exposed himself to peril in the service of his sovereign and his country, which, though it was glorious to do, yet would have been ignominious in such circumstances to have declined. But Christ took the field, though he was the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Christ took the field, though he was sure to drop in the engagement, and put on the harness, though he knew beforehand that it must reek with his blood. That prince of heaven resigned his royal person, not barely to the hazard but to the inevitable stroke, to death, certain in its approach, and armed with all its horrors; and for whom? Not for those who were

* 1 John v. 20.

in any degree deserving, but for his own disobedient creatures, for the pardon of condemned malefactors; for a band of rebels, a race of traitors, the most obnoxious and inexcusable of all criminals, whom he might have left to perish in their iniquities, without the least impeachment of his goodness, and to the display of his avenging justice.

The one, it is probable, died expeditiously, was suddenly wounded and soon slain. A bullet lodged in his heart, a sword sheathed in his breast, or a battle-axe cleaving the brain, might put a speedy end to his misery, dispatch him 'as in a moment;' whereas the divine Redeemer expired in tedious and protracted torments. His pangs were as lingering as they were exquisite. Even in the prelude to his last suffering, what a load of sorrows overwhelmed his sacred humanity! till the intolerable pressure wrung blood, instead of sweat, from every pore; till the crimson flood stained all his raiment and tinged the very stones. But, when the last scene of the tragedy commenced, when the executioner's hammer had nailed him to the cross, Oh! how many dismal hours did that illustrious sufferer hang, a spectacle of woe to God, to angels, and to men! His temples mangled with the thorny crown! his hands and feet cleft with the rugged irons! his whole body covered with wounds and bruises! and his soul, his very soul, pierced with unutterable pangs of distress?

So long he hung, that nature through all her dominions was thrown into sympathizing commotions. The earth could no longer sustain such barbarous indignities without trembling, nor the sun behold them without horror. Nay, so long did he hang in this extremity of agony and torture, that the alarm

reached even the remote regions of the dead. Never, O my soul, never forget the amazing truth. The Lamb of God was seized, was bound, was slaughtered with the utmost inhumanity, and endureth death in all its bitterness for thee. His murderers, studiously cruel, so guided the fatal cup, that he tasted every drop of its gall, before he drank it off to the very dregs.

Once again, the warrior died like a hero, and fell gallantly in the field of battle. But died not Christ as a fool dieth?* Not on the bed of honour with scars of glory in his breast, but like some execrable miscreant on a gibbet, with lashes of the vile scourge on his back. Yes, the blessed Jesus bowed his expiring head on the accursed tree, suspended between heaven and earth, as an outcast from both and unworthy of either.

What suitable returns of inflamed and adoring devotion can we make to the Holy One of God; thus dying, that we might live; dying in ignominy and anguish, that we might live for ever in the heights of joy, and sit for ever on thrones of glory? Alas! it is not in us, impotent insensible mortals, to be duly thankful. He only who confers such inconceivably rich favours, can enkindle a proper warmth of grateful affection. Then build thyself a monument, most gracious Immanuel, build thyself an everlasting monument of gratitude in our souls. Inscribe the memory of thy matchless beneficence, not with ink and pen, but with that precious blood which gushed from thy wounded veins. Engrave it, not with the hammer and chisel, but with that sharpened spear which pierced thy sacred side. Let it stand conspi-

* 2 Sam. iii. 33. Of this indignity our Lord complains: Are you come out as against a thief?—Matt. xxvi. 55.

cuous and indelible, not on outward tables of stone, but on the very inmost tables of our hearts.

One thing more let me observe, before I bid adieu to this entombed warrior, and his garnished sepulchre. How mean are these ostentatious methods of bribing the vote of fame, and purchasing a little posthumous renown! What a poor substitute for a set of memorable actions, is polished alabaster, or the mimicry of sculptured marble! The real excellency of this bleeding patriot is written on the minds of his countrymen; it would be remembered with applause so long as the nation subsists, without this artificial expedient to perpetuate it. And such, such is the monument I would wish for myself. Let me leave a memorial in the breasts of my fellow-creatures. Let surviving friends bear witness, that I have not lived to myself alone, nor been unserviceable in my generation. O! let an uninterrupted series of beneficent offices be the inscription; and the best interests of my acquaintance, the plate that exhibits it.

Let the poor as they pass by my grave point at the little spot, and thankfully acknowledge, 'There lies the man whose unwearied kindness was the constant relief of my various distresses, who tenderly visited my languishing bed, and readily supplied my indigent circumstances. How often were his counsels a guide to my perplexed thoughts, and a cordial to my dejected spirits! 'Tis owing to God's blessing, on his seasonable charities, and prudent consolations, that I now live, and live in comfort.' Let a person, once ignorant and ungodly, lift up his eyes to heaven, and say within himself, as he walks over my bones, 'Here are the last remains of that sincere friend, who

watched for my soul. I can never forget with what heedless gaiety I was posting on in the paths of perdition; and I tremble to think into what irretrievable ruin I might quickly have been plunged, had not his faithful admonitions arrested me in the wild career. I was unacquainted with the gospel of peace, and had no concern for its unsearchable treasures; but now, enlightened by his instructive conversation, I see the all-sufficiency of my Saviour, and, animated by his repeated exhortations, I count all things but loss, that I may win Christ. Methinks, his discourses seasoned with religion, and set home by the Divine Spirit, still tingle in my ears, are still warm on my heart, and, I trust, will be more and more operative, till we meet each other in the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

The only infallible way of immortalizing our characters, a way equally open to the meanest and most exalted fortune, is, 'To make our calling and election sure,' to gain some sweet evidence that our names are written in heaven. Then, however they may be disregarded or forgotten among men, they will not fail to be had in everlasting remembrance before the Lord. This is, of all distinctions, far the noblest. Ambition, be this thy object, and every page of Scripture will sanctify thy passion; even grace itself will fan thy flame. As to earthly memorials, yet a little while, and they are all obliterated. The tongue of those, whose happiness we have zealously promoted, must soon be silent in the coffin. Characters cut with a pen of iron, and committed to the solid rock, will ere long cease to be legible. But as many as are enrolled 'in the Lamb's book of life,' He himself declares, shall never be

blotted out from those annals of eternity.* When a flight of years has mouldered the triumphal column into dust; when the brazen statue perishes under the corroding hand of time; those honours still continue, still are blooming and incorruptible in the world of glory.

Make the extended skies your tomb;
Let stars record your worth:
Yet know, vain mortals, all must die,
As nature's sickliest birth.

Would bounteous Heav'n indulge my prayer,
I frame a nobler choice;
Nor, living, wish the pompous pile;
Nor, dead, regret the loss.

In thy fair book of life divine,
My God, inscribe my name:
There let it fill some humble place,
Beneath the slaughter'd Lamb.

Thy saints, while ages roll away,
In endless fame survive;
Their glories, o'er the wrongs of time
Greatly triumphant, live.

Yonder entrance leads, I suppose, to the vault. Let me turn aside, and take one view of the habitation and its tenants. The sullen door grates upon its hinges: not used to receive many visitants, it admits me with reluctance and murmurs. What meaneth this sudden trepidation; while I descend the steps, and am visiting the pale nations of the dead? Be composed, my spirits; there is nothing to fear in these quiet chambers. 'Here, even the wicked cease from troubling.'

Good heavens! what a solemn scene! How dismal the gloom! Here is perpetual darkness, and night even at noonday. How doleful the solitude! Not one trace of cheerful society; but sorrow and terror

* Rev. iii. 5.

seem to have made this their dreaded abode. Hark! how the hollow dome resounds at every tread. The echoes, that long have slept, are awakened; and lament, and sigh along the walls.

A beam or two finds its way through the grates, and reflects a feeble glimmer from the nails of the coffins. So many of those sad spectacles, half concealed in shades, half seen dimly by the baleful twilight, add a deeper horror to those gloomy mansions. I pore upon the inscriptions, and am just able to pick out, that these are the remains of the rich and renowned. No vulgar dead are deposited here. The most illustrious and right honourable have claimed this for their last retreat: and, indeed, they retain somewhat of a shadowy pre-eminence. They lie, ranged in mournful order, and, in a sort of silent pomp, under the arches of an ample sepulchre; while meaner corpses, without much ceremony, 'go down to the stones of the pit.'

My apprehensions recover from their surprise. I find here are no phantoms, but such as fear raises. However, it still amazes me to observe the wonders of this nether world. Those who received vast revenues, and called whole lordships their own, are here reduced to half a dozen feet of earth, or confined in a few sheets of lead. Rooms of state and sumptuous furniture are resigned for no other ornament than the shroud, for no other apartment than the darksome niche. Where is the star, that blazed upon the breast; or coronet, that glittered round the temples? The only remains of departed dignity are the weather-beaten hatchment and the tattered escutcheon. I see no splendid retinue surrounding this solitary dwelling. The lordly equipage hovers no

longer about the lifeless master. He has no other attendant than a dusty statue, which, while the regardless world is as gay as ever, the sculptor's hand has taught to weep.

Those who gloried in high-born ancestors and noble pedigree here drop their lofty pretensions. They acknowledge kindred with creeping things, and quarter arms with the meanest reptiles. They say to corruption, 'Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister.' Or, should they still assume the style of distinction, ah! how impotent were the claim! how apparent the ostentation! Is it said by their monument, Here lies the great? How easily is it replied by the spectator——

> ——False marble! where!
> Nothing but poor and sordid dust lies here.

Mortifying truth! Sufficient, one would think, to wean the most sanguine appetite from this transitory state of things; from its sickly satisfactions, its fading glories, its vanishing treasures.

> For now, ye lying vanities of life!
> Ye ever-tempting, ever-cheating train!
> Where are you now! And what is your amount!

Where is all the world to these poor breathless beings? What are their pleasures? a bubble broke. What their honours? a dream that is forgotten. What the sum-total of their enjoyments below? once, perhaps, it appeared to inexperienced and fond desire, something considerable; but, now death has measured it with his line and weighed it in his scale, what is the upshot? Alas! it is shorter than a span. lighter than the dancing spark; and driven away like the dissolving smoke.

Indulge, my soul, a serious pause. Recollect all

the gay things that were wont to dazzle thy eyes and inveigle thy affections. Here examine those baits of sense; here form an estimate of their real value. Suppose thyself first among the favourites of fortune, who revel in the lap of pleasure, who shine in the robes of honour, and swim in tides of inexhausted riches. Yet, how soon will the passing bell proclaim thy exit! And when once that iron call has summoned thee to thy future reckoning, where would all these gratifications be? At that period, how will all the pageantry of the most affluent, splendid, or luxurious circumstances, vanish into empty air! And, is this a happiness so passionately to be coveted?

I thank you, ye relics of sounding titles and magnificent names. Ye have taught me more of the littleness of the world than all the volumes of my library. Your nobility arrayed in a winding-sheet, your grandeur mouldering in an urn, are the most indisputable proofs of the nothingness of created things. Never, surely, did Providence write this important point in such legible characters, as in the ashes of my lord, or on the corpse of his grace. Let others, if they please, pay their obsequious court to your wealthy sons, and ignobly fawn, or anxiously sue for preferments: my thoughts shall often resort, in pensive contemplation, to the sepulchres of their sires; and learn, from their sleeping dust—to moderate my expectation from mortals, to stand disengaged from every undue attachment to the little interests of time, to get above the delusive amusements of honour, the gaudy tinsels of wealth, and all the empty shadows of a perishing world.

Hark! what sound is that! In such a situation every noise alarms. Solemn and slow, it breaks again

upon the silent air. 'Tis the striking of the clock—designed, one would imagine, to ratify all my serious meditations. Methinks it says Amen, and sets a seal to every improving hint. It tells me, that another portion of my appointed time is elapsed. One calls it, 'the knell of my departed hours.' 'Tis the watch-word to vigilance and activity. It cries in the ear of reason, 'Redeem the time. Catch the favourable gales of opportunity: Oh! catch them, while they breathe; before they are irrecoverably lost. The span of life shortens continually. Thy minutes are all upon the wing, and hastening to be gone. Thou art a borderer upon eternity, and making incessant advances to the state thou art contemplating.' May the admonition sink deep into an attentive and obedient mind! May it teach me that heavenly arithmetic, of 'numbering my days, and applying my heart unto wisdom.'

I have often walked beneath the impending promontory's craggy cliff; I have sometimes trod the vast spaces of the lonely desert, and penetrated the inmost recesses of the dreary cavern: but never, never beheld nature louring with so tremendous a form; never felt such impressions of awe striking cold on my heart, as under these black-browed arches, amidst these mouldy walls, and surrounded by such rueful objects; where melancholy, deepest melancholy, for ever spreads her raven wings! Let me now emerge from the damp and dreadful obscurity! Farewell, ye seats of desolation, and shades of death! Gladly I revisit the realms of day.

Having cast a superficial view upon these receptacles of the dead, curiosity prompts my inquiry to a more intimate survey. Could we draw back the co-

vering of the tomb; could we discern what those are now who once were mortals—O! how would it surprise and grieve us!—surprise us, to behold the prodigious transformation which has taken place on every individual; grieve us, to observe the dishonour done to our nature in general within these subterraneous lodgments!

Here, the sweet and winning aspect, that wore perpetually an attractive smile, grins horribly a naked ghastly skull. The eye that outshone the diamond's brilliancy, and glanced its lovely lightning into the most guarded heart: alas! where is it? Where shall we find the rolling sparkler? How are all its sprightly beams eclipsed, totally eclipsed! The tongue, that once commanded all the power of eloquence, in this strange land has 'forgot its cunning.' Where are now those strains of harmony which ravished our ears? Where is that flow of persuasion, which carried captive our judgments? The great master of language and of song is become silent as the night that surrounds him. The pampered flesh, so lately clothed in purple and fine linen, how is it covered rudely with clods of clay! There was a time, when the timorously nice creature could scarce 'adventure to set a foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness;* but is now enwrapped in clammy earth, and sleeps on no softer a pillow than the ragged gravel-stones. Here, 'the strong men bow themselves.' The nervous arm is unstrung; the brawny sinews are relaxed; the limbs, not long ago the seats of vigour and activity, lie down motionless, and the bones, which were as bars of iron, are crushed into dust.

Here, the man of business forgets all his favourite

* Deut. xxviii. 56.

schemes, and discontinues the pursuit of gain. Here is a total stand to the circulation of merchandise, and the hurry of trade. In these solitary recesses, as in the building of Solomon's temple, is heard no sound of the hammer and axe. The winding-sheet and the coffin are the utmost bound of all earthly devices. 'Hitherto may they go, but no farther.' Here, the sons of pleasure take a final farewell of their dear delights. No more is the sensualist anointed with oil, or crowned with rose-buds. He chants no more to the melody of the viol, nor revels any longer at the banquet of wine. Instead of sumptuous tables and delicious treats, the poor voluptuary is himself a feast for fattened insects; the reptile riots on his flesh; 'the worm feeds sweetly on him.'* Here also beauty fails; bright beauty drops her lustre here. O! how her roses fade, and her lilies languish, in this bleak soil! How does the grand leveller pour contempt upon the charmer of our hearts! How turn to deformity, what captivated the world before!

Could the lover have a sight of his once enchanting fair one, what a startling astonishment would seize him! 'Is this the object I not long ago so passionately admired! I said, she was divinely fair; and thought her somewhat more than mortal. Her form was symmetry itself; every elegance breathed in her air; and all the Graces waited on her motions. 'Twas music, when she spoke; but, when she spoke encouragement, 'twas little less than rapture. How my heart danced to those charming accents! And can that which, some weeks ago, was to admiration lovely, be now so insufferably loathsome? Where are those blushing cheeks? where the coral lips? where that

* Job xxiv. 20.

ivory neck, on which the curling jet in such glossy ringlets flowed? with a thousand other beauties of person, and ten thousand delicacies of action? Amazing alteration! Delusory bliss! Fondly I gazed upon the glittering meteor. It shone brightly; and I mistook it for a star; for a permanent and substantial good. But how is it fallen! fallen from an orb, not its own! And all that I can trace on earth, is but a putrid mass.'

Lie, poor Florella! lie deep, as thou dost in obscure darkness. Let night, with her impenetrable shades, always conceal thee. May no prying eye, be witness to thy disgrace: but let thy surviving sisters think upon thy state, when they contemplate the idol in the glass. When the pleasing image rises gracefully to view, surrounded with a world of charms, and flushed with joy at the consciousness of them all; then, in those minutes of temptation and danger, when vanity uses to steal into the thoughts —then, let them remember what a veil of horror is drawn over a face, which was once beautiful and brilliant as theirs. Such a seasonable reflection might regulate the labours of the toilet, and create a more earnest solicitude to polish the jewel, than to varnish the casket. It might then become their highest ambition to have the mind decked with divine virtues, and dressed after the amiable pattern of their Redeemer's holiness.

And would this prejudice their persons, or depreciate their charms? Quite the reverse. It would spread a sort of heavenly glory over the finest set of features, and heighten the loveliness of every other engaging accomplishment. What is yet a more inviting consideration, these flowers would not wither

with nature nor be tarnished by time; but would open continually into richer beauties, and flourish even in the winter of age. But the most incomparable recommendation of these noble qualities, is, that, from their hallowed relics, and from the fragrant ashes of the phœnix, will ere long arise an illustrious form, bright as the wings of angels, lasting as the light of the new Jerusalem.

For my part, the remembrance of this sad revolution shall make me ashamed to pay my devotion to a shrine of perishing flesh, and afraid to expect all my happiness from so brittle a joy. It shall teach me not to think too highly of well-proportioned clay, though formed in the most elegant mould, and animated with the sweetest soul. 'Tis Heaven's last, best, and crowning gift, to be received with gratitude, and cherished with love, as a most valuable blessing; not worshipped with the incense of flattery and strains of fulsome adoration, as a goddess. It will cure, I trust, the dotage of my eyes; and incline me always to prefer the substantial 'ornaments of a meek and virtuous spirit,' before the transient decorations of white and red on the skin.

Here I called in my roving meditations from their long excursion on this tender subject. Fancy listened a while to the soliloquy of a lover. Now judgment resumes the reins and guides my thoughts to more near and self-interesting inquiries. However, upon a review of the whole scene, crowded with spectacles of mortality and trophies of death, I could not forbear smiting my breast, and fetching a sigh, and lamenting over the noblest of all visible beings, laid prostrate under the feet of 'the pale horse and his rider.'* I could not forbear repeating that pathetic

* Rev. vi. 8.

exclamation; 'Oh! thou,* Adam, what hast thou done?' What desolation has thy disobedience wrought in the earth? See the malignity, the ruinous malignity of sin! Sin has demolished so many stately structures of flesh: sin has made such havoc among the most excellent ranks of God's lower creation: and sin (that deadly bane of our nature) would have plunged our better part into the execrable horrors of the nethermost hell, had not our merciful Mediator interposed, and given himself for our ransom. Therefore what grateful acknowledgments does the whole world of penitent sinners owe; what ardent returns of love will a whole heaven of glorified believers pay, to such a friend, benefactor, and deliverer!

Musing upon these melancholy objects, a faithful remembrancer suggests from within—'Must this sad change succeed in me also? Am I to draw my last gasp; to become a breathless corpse; and be, what I deplore? Is there a time approaching, when this body shall be carried out upon the bier, and consigned to his clay-cold bed? while some kind acquaintance, perhaps, may drop one parting tear, and cry, Alas! my brother! Is the time approaching?' Nothing is more certain; a decree, much surer than the law of the Medes and Persians, has irrevocably determined the doom.

Should one of these ghastly figures burst from his confinement, and start up in a frightful deformity before me—should the haggard skeleton lift a clattering hand, and point it full in my view—should it open the stiffened jaws, and with a hoarse tremendous murmur break this profound silence—should it accost me, as Samuel's apparition addressed the trembling

* 2 Esdr. vii. 41.

king, 'The Lord shall deliver thee also into the hands of death; yet a little while, and thou shalt be with me,'*—the solemn warning, delivered in so striking a manner, must strongly impress my imagination. A message in thunder would scarce sink deeper. Yet, there is abundantly greater reason to be alarmed by that express declaration of the Lord God Almighty, 'Thou shalt surely die.' Well, then, since sentence is passed, since I am a condemned man, and know not when the dead warrant may arrive; let me die to sin, and die to the world, before I die beneath the stroke of a righteous God. Let me employ the little uncertain interval of respite from execution, in preparing for a happier state and a better life; that when the fatal moment comes, and I am commanded to shut my eyes upon all things here below, I may open them again to see my Saviour in the mansions above.

Since this body which is so fearfully and wonderfully made, must fall to pieces in the grave; since I must soon resign all by bodily powers to darkness, inactivity, and corruption, let it be my constant care to use them well while I possess them! Let my hands be stretched forth to relieve the needy, and always be more 'ready to give than to receive.' Let my knees bend in deepest humiliation before the throne of grace, while my eyes are cast down to the earth in penitential confusion, or devoutly looking up to heaven for pardoning mercy! In every friendly interview, let the 'law of kindness dwell on my lips; or rather, if the seriousness of my acquaintance permits, let the Gospel of peace flow from my tongue. O! that I might be enabled, in every public concourse, to lift up my voice like a trumpet, and pour

* 1 Sam. xxviii. 19.

abroad a more joyful sound than its most melodious accents, in proclaiming the glad tidings of free salvation! Be shut, my ears, resolutely shut, against the malevolent whispers of slander, and the contagious breath of filthy talking. But be swift to hear the instructions of wisdom; be all attention when your Redeemer speaks; imbibe the precious truths; and convey them carefully to the heart. Carry me, my feet, to the temple of the Lord, to the beds of the sick, and houses of the poor. May all my members, devoted entirely to my divine Master, be the willing instruments of promoting his glory!

Then, ye embalmers, ye may spare your pains. These works of faith and labours of love, these shall be my spices and perfumes. Enwrapped in these, I would lay me gently down, and sleep sweetly in the blessed Jesus; hoping that God will 'give commandment concerning my bones,' and one day fetch them up from the dust, as silver from the furnace, purified, 'I say not, seven times, but seventy times seven.'

Here my contemplation took wing, and in an instant alighted in the garden, adjoining Mount Calvary. Having viewed the abode of my deceased fellow-creatures, methought I longed to see the place where our Lord lay. And, Oh! what a marvellous spectacle was once exhibited in this memorable sepulchre! He, 'who clothes himself with light as with a garment, and walks upon the wings of the wind;'*

* The Scriptures, speaking of the Supreme Being, say—He walketh upon the waves of the sea; to denote his uncontrollable power, Job ix. 8.—He walketh in the circuit o heaven; to express the immensity of his presence, Job xxii. 14.—He walketh upon the wings of the wind; to signify the amazing swiftness of his operation, Psal. civ. 3; in which last phrase there is, I think, ane legance and emphasis not taken notice of by our commentators, yet unequalled in any writer.

He was pleased to wear the habiliments of mortality, and dwelt among the prostrate dead. Who can repeat the wondrous truth too often? Who can dwell upon the transporting theme too long? He, who sits enthroned in glory, and diffuses bliss among all the heavenly hosts; he was once a pale and bloody corpse, and pressed this little spot.

O death! how great was thy triumph in that hour! Never did thy gloomy realms contain such a prisoner before. Prisoner, did I say? No; he was more than conqueror. He arose, far more mightily than Samson, from a transient slumber; broke down the gates, and demolished the strong-holds of those dark dominions. And this, O mortals, this is your only consolation and security. Jesus has trod the dreadful path, and smoothed it for your passage. Jesus, sleeping in the chambers of the tomb, has brightened the dismal mansion, and left an inviting odour in those beds of dust. The dying Jesus! (never let the comfortable truth depart from your minds! the dying Jesus) is your sure protection, your unquestionable passport through the territories of the grave. Believe in Him, and they shall prove a 'highway to Sion;' shall transmit you safe to Paradise. Believe in Him, and you shall

—Not, He flieth; He runneth; but, He walketh: and that, on the very wings of the wind; on the most impetuous of elements, roused into its utmost rage, and sweeping along with inconceivable rapidity. A tumult in nature, not to be described, is the composed and sedate work of the Deity. A speed not to be measured, is (with reverence I use the expression, and to comport with our low methods of conception) the solemn and majestic foot-pace of Jehovah. How flat are the following lines, even in the great master of lyric song,

Ocyor cervis, et agente nimbos
Ocyor Euro,

Then compared with this inimitable stroke of divine poetry—He walketh upon the wings of the wind!

be no losers, but unspeakable gainers, by your dissolution. For hear what the oracle of heaven says upon this important point: 'Whoso believeth in Me, shall never die.'* What sublime and emphatical language is this! This much, at least, it must import—The nature of that last change shall 'be surprisingly altered for the better: it shall no longer be inflicted as a punishment, but rather be vouchsafed as a blessing. To such persons it shall come attended with such a train of benefits, as will render it a kind of happy impropriety to call it dying. Dying! No; 'tis then they truly begin to live. Their exit is the end of their frailty and their entrance upon perfection. Their last groan is the prelude to life and immortality.'

O ye timorous souls, that are terrified at the sound of the passing-bell, that turn pale at the sight of an opened grave, and can scarce behold a coffin or a skull without a shuddering horror: Ye that are in bondage to the grisly tyrant, and tremble at the shaking of his iron rod; cry mightily to the Father of your spirits, for faith in his dear Son. Faith will free you from your slavery.† Faith will embolden you to tread on (this fiercest of) serpents.‡ Old Simeon, clasping the child Jesus in the arms of his flesh, and the glorious Mediator in the arms of his faith, departs with tranquillity and peace. That bitter persecutor Saul, having won Christ, being found in Christ, longs to be dismissed from cumbrous clay, and kindles into rapture at the prospect of dissolution.§ Methinks

* John xi. 26.

† Death's terror is the mountain faith removes:
'Tis faith disarms destruction.—
Believe, and look with triumph on the tomb.—*Young.*

‡ Luke x. 19. § Phil. i. 23. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

I see another of Immanuel's followers, trusting in his Saviour, leaning on his Beloved, go down to the silent shades with composure and alacrity.* In this powerful name an innumerable company of sinful creatures have set up their banners, and 'overcome, through the blood of the Lamb.' Authorized by the Captain of thy salvation, thou also mayst set thy feet upon the neck of this king of terrors. Furnished with this antidote, thou also mayst play around the hole of the asp, and put thy undaunted hand on this cockatrice-den.† Thou mayst feel the viper‡ fastening to thy mortal part, and fear no evil: thou shalt one day shake it off by a joyful resurrection, and suffer no harm.

Resurrection! That cheering word eases my mind of an anxious thought, and solves a most momentous question. I was going to ask, 'Wherefore do all these corpses lie here, in this abject condition? Is this their final state? Has death conquered, and will the tyrant hold captivity captive? How long wilt thou forget them, O Lord, for ever? No, saith the voice from heaven, the word of divine revelation; the righteous are all 'prisoners of hope.'§ There is an hour (an awful secret that, and known only to all-foreseeing Wisdom) an appointed hour there is, when an act of grace will pass the great seal above, and give them an universal discharge, a general delivery from the abodes of corruption. Then shall the Lord Jesus descend from heaven, with the shout of the archangel and the trump of God. Destruction itself shall hear his call, and the obedient grave give up her dead. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they shake off the sleep of ten thousand years, and spring

* 2 Pet. i. 14. † Isa. xi. 8.
‡ Acts xxviii. 5. § Zech. ix. 12.

forth, like the bounding roe, to 'meet their Lord in the air.'

And O! with what cordial congratulations, what transporting endearments, do the soul and body, those affectionate companions, re-unite! But with how much greater demonstrations of kindness are they both received by their compassionate Redeemer! The Ancient of Days, who comes in the clouds of heaven, is their friend, their father, their bridegroom. He comes with irresistible power and infinite glory, but they have nothing to fear from his majestic appearance. Those tremendous solemnities which spread desolation and astonishment through the universe, serve only to inflame their love and heighten their hopes. The Judge, the awful Judge, amidst all his magnificence and splendour, vouchsafes to confess their names, vouchsafes to commemorate their fidelity, before all the inhabitants of the skies, and the whole assembled world.

Hark! the thunders are hushed. See! the lightnings cease their rage. The angelic armies stand in silent suspense. The whole race of Adam is wrapped in pleasing or anxious expectations. And now, that adorable Person, whose favour is better than life, whose acceptance is a crown of glory, lifts up the light of his countenance upon the righteous; he speaks, and what ravishing words proceed from his gracious lips! what ecstacies of delight they enkindle in the breasts of the faithful! 'I accept you, O my people! Ye are they that believed in my name. Ye are they that renounced yourselves and are complete in me. I see no spot or blemish in you, for ye are washed in my blood, and clothed with my righteousness. Renewed by my spirit, ye have glorified me on earth,

and have been faithful unto death. Come then, ye servants of holiness, enter into the joy of your Lord. Come, ye children of light, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom that shall never be removed, wear the crown which fadeth not away, and enjoy pleasures for evermore!'

Then, it will be one of the smallest privileges of the righteous, that they shall languish no more; that sickness will never again show her pale countenance in their dwellings.* Death itself will be swallowed up in victory.' That fatal javelin, which has drunk the blood of monarchs, and finds its way to the hearts of all the sons of Adam, shall be utterly broken. That enormous scythe, which has struck empires from their root, and swept ages and generations into oblivion, shall lie by in perpetual uselessness. Sin also, which filled thy quiver, thou insatiate archer!—sin, which strung thy arm with resistless vigour; which pointed all thy shafts with inevitable destruction—sin will then be done away. Whatever is frail or depraved will be thrown off with our grave-clothes. All to come is perfect holiness, and consummate happiness, the term of whose continuance is eternity.

O eternity! eternity! how are our boldest, our strongest thoughts, lost and overwhelmed in thee! Who can set landmarks to limit thy dimensions, or find plummets to fathom thy depths? Arithmeticians

* Isaiah, speaking of the new Jerusalem, mentions this as one of its immunities: 'The inhabitants thereof shall no more say, I am sick.' Another clause in its royal charter runs thus: 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.' Isa. xxxiii. 24. Rev. xxi. 4.

have figures to compute all the progressions of time; astronomers have instruments to calculate the distances of the planets; but what numbers can state, what lines can guage, the lengths and breadths of eternity? 'It is higher than heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, broader than the sea.'*

Mysterious, mighty existence! a sum not to be lessened by the largest deductions! an extent not to be contracted by all possible diminutions! None can truly say, after the most prodigious waste of ages, 'So much of eternity is gone;' for, when millions of centuries are elapsed, it is but just commencing; and, when millions more have run their ample round, it will be no nearer ending. Yea, when ages, numerous as the bloom of spring, increased by the herbage of summer, both augmented by the leaves of autumn, and all multiplied by the drops of rain which drown the winter—when these and ten thousand times ten thousand more—more than can be represented by any similitude, or imagined by any conception—when all these are revolved and finished, eternity, vast, boundless, amazing eternity, will only be beginning!

What a pleasing, yet awful thought is this! full of delight, and full of dread. O! may it alarm our fears, quicken our hopes, and animate all our endeavours! Since we are so soon to launch into this endless and inconceivable state, let us give all diligence, to secure our entrance into bliss. Now let us give all diligence, because there is no alteration in the scenes of futurity. The wheel never turns: all is stedfast and immoveable beyond the grave. Whether

* Job xi. 8, 9.

we are then seated on the throne, or stretched on the rack; a seal will be set to our condition by the hand of everlasting mercy or inflexible justice. The saints always rejoice amidst the smiles of Heaven; their harps are perpetually tuned; their triumphs admit of no interruption, The ruin of the wicked is irremediable. The fatal sentence, once passed, is never to be repealed. No hope of exchanging their doleful habitations; but all things bear the same dismal aspect for ever and ever.

The wicked! my mind recoils at the apprehension of their misery. It has studiously waived the fearful subject, and seems unwilling to pursue it, even now. But 'tis better to reflect upon it for a few minutes, than to endure it to eternal ages. Perhaps the consideration of their aggravated misery may be profitably terrible; may teach me more highly to prize the Saviour, who 'delivers from going down into the bottomless pit;' may drive me, like the avenger's sword, to this only city of refuge for obnoxious sinners,

The wicked seem to lie here, like malefactors, in a deep and strong dungeon, reserved against the day of trial. 'Their departure was without peace.' Clouds of horror sat louring upon their closing eyelids, most sadly foreboding the blackness of darkness for ever.' When the last sickness seized their frame, and the inevitable change advanced; when they saw the fatal arrow fitting to the strings, saw the deadly archer aiming at their hearts, and felt the envenomed shaft fastened in their vitals—good God! what fearfulness came upon them! What horrible dread overwhelmed them! How did they stand shuddering and aghast upon the tremendous precipice! excessively afraid to

plunge into the abyss of eternity, yet utterly unable to maintain their standing on the verge of life.

O! what pale reviews, what startling prospects conspire to augment their sorrows! They look backward! and behold! a most melancholy scene! sins unrepented of; mercy slighted; and the day of grace ending! They look forward, and nothing presents itself but the righteous Judge, the dreadful tribunal, and a most solemn reckoning. They roll around their affrighted eyes on attending friends. If accomplices in debauchery, it sharpens their anguish to consider this farther aggravation of their guilt, that they have not sinned alone, but drawn others into the snare. If religious acquaintance, it strikes a fresh gash into their hearts, to think of never seeing them any more, but only at an unapproachable distance, separated by the unpassable gulf.

At last, perhaps, they begin to pray. Finding no other possible way of relief, they are constrained to apply unto the Almighty. With trembling lips and a faltering tongue, they cry unto that Sovereign Being, 'who kills and makes alive.' But why have they deferred, so long deferred, their addresses to God? why have they despised all his counsels, and stood incorrigible under his incessant reproofs? How often have they been forewarned of these terrors and most importunately entreated to seek the Lord while he might be found? I wish they may obtain mercy at the eleventh, at the last hour. I wish they may be snatched from the jaws, the opened, the gaping, the almost closing jaws of damnation. But, alas! who can tell whether affronted Majesty will lend an ear to their complaint? whether the Holy One will work a miracle of grace in behalf of such trans-

gressors? He may, for aught any mortal knows, 'laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh.'

Thus they lie, groaning out the poor remains of life? their limbs bathed in sweat; their heart struggling with convulsive throes; pains insupportable throbbing in every pulse; and innumerable darts of agony transfixing their conscience.

> In that dread moment, how the frantic soul
> Raves round the walls of her clay tenement;
> Runs to each avenue; and shrieks for help;
> But skrieks in vain! How wistfully she looks
> On all she's leaving, now no longer hers!
> A little longer, yet a little longer,
> O! might she stay to wash away her crimes,
> And fit her for her passage! Mournful sight!
> Her very eyes weep blood; and every groan
> She heaves, is big with horror; but the foe,
> Like a staunch murd'rer, steady to his purpose,
> Pursues her close through ev'ry lane of life,
> Nor misses once the track; but presses on;
> Till forc'd at last to the tremendous verge,
> At once she sinks. *Blair's Grave.*

If this be the end of the ungodly, 'my soul, come not thou into their secret! unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!' How awfully accomplished is that prediction of inspired wisdom! Sin, though seemingly sweet in the commission, yet at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Fly therefore from the tents, O! fly from the ways of such wretched men.

Happy dissolution! were this the period of their woes. But, alas! all these tribulations are only 'the beginning of sorrows;' a small drop only from that 'cup of trembling,' which is mingled for their future portion. No sooner has the last pang dislodged their reluctant souls, but they are hurried into the presence of an injured and angry God; not under the conduct-

ing care of beneficent angels, but exposed to the insults of accursed spirits, who lately tempted them, who now upbraid them, and will for ever torment them. Who can imagine their confusion and distress, when they stand guilty and inexcusable before their incensed Creator? They are received with frowns. The God that made them has 'no mercy on them.'* The Prince of Peace rejects them with abhorrence. He consigns them over to chains of darkness and receptacles of despair, against the severer doom and more public infamy of the great day. Then, all the vials of wrath will be emptied upon these wretched creatures. The law they have violated, and the Gospel they have slighted; the power they have defied, and the goodness they have abused; will all get themselves honour in their exemplary destruction. Then God, the God to whom vengeance belongeth, will draw the arrow to the very head, and set them as the mark to his inexorable displeasure.

Resurrection will be no privilege to them; but immortality itself their everlasting curse. Would they not bless the grave, 'that land where all things are forgotten,' and wish to lie eternally hid in its deepest gloom? But the dust refuses to conceal their persons, or to draw a veil over their practices. They also must awake; must arise; must appear at the bar, and meet the Judge; a Judge before whom 'the pillars of heaven tremble, and the earth melts away;' a Judge, once long-suffering and very compassionate, but now unalterably determined to teach stubborn offenders what it is to provoke the Omnipotent Godhead; what it is to trample upon the blood of his

* Isaiah xxvii. 2.

Son, and offer despite to all the gracious overtures of his Spirit.

O! the perplexity! the distraction, that must seize the impenitent rebels when they are summoned to the great tribunal! What will they do in this day of severe visitation, this day of final decision? Where? how? whence can they find help? To which of the saints will they turn? Whither betake themselves for shelter or for succour? Alas! 'tis all in vain! 'tis all too late. Friends and acquaintance know them no more! men and angels abandon them to their approaching doom; even the Mediator, the Mediator himself, deserts them in this dreadful hour. To fly, will be impracticable: to justify themselves, still more impossible: and now, to make any applications, utterly unavailable.

Behold! the books are opened; the secrets of all hearts are disclosed; the hidden things of darkness are brought to light. How empty, how ineffectual now, are all those refined artifices, with which hypocrites imposed upon their fellow-creatures, and preserved a character in the sight of men! The jealous God, who has been about their path, and about their bed, and spied out all their ways, sets before them the things that they have done. They cannot answer him one in a thousand, nor stand in the awful judgment. The heavens reveal their iniquities, and the earth rises up against them.* They are speechless with guilt, and stigmatized with infamy before all the armies of the sky, and all the nations of the redeemed. What a favour would they esteem it, to hide their ashamed heads in the bottom of the ocean,

* Job xx.

or even to be buried beneath the ruins of the tottering world!

If the contempt poured upon them be thus insupportable, how will their hearts endure when the sword of infinite indignation is unsheathed, and fiercely waved around their defenceless heads, or pointed directly at their naked breasts? How must the wretches scream with wild amazement, and rend the very heavens with their cries, when the right-aiming thunderbolts go abroad?—go abroad with a dreadful commission to drive them from the kingdom of glory, and plunge them, not into the sorrows of a moment, or the tortures of an hour, but into all the restless agonies of unquenchable fire and everlasting despair.*

Misery of miseries! too shocking for reflection to dwell upon. But if so dismal to foresee, and that at a distance, together with some comfortable expectation of escaping it, O! how bitter, inconceivably bitter, to bear, without any intermission, or any mitigation, through hopeless and eternal ages!

Who has any bowels of pity? Who has any sentiments of compassion? Who has any tender concern for his fellow-creatures? Who?—in God's name and for Christ's sake, let him show it, by warning every man, and beseeching every man, to seek the Lord while he may be found, to throw down the arms of rebellion before the act of indemnity expires, submissively to adore the Lamb, while he holds out the golden sceptre. Here, let us act the friendly part to

* Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all, but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsum'd.—*Milton.*

mankind; here, let the whole force of our benevolence exert itself, in exhorting relations, acquaintance, neighbours, whomsoever we may probably influence, to take the wings of faith unfeigned, of repentance undelayed, and flee away from this wrath to come.

Upon the whole, what stupendous discoveries are these! Lay them up in a faithful remembrance, O my soul; recollect them with the most serious attention, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; when thou walkest, receive them for thy companions; when thou talkest, listen to them as thy prompters; and whatever thou doest, consult them as thy directors. Influenced by these considerations, thy views will greaten, thy affections be exalted, and thou thyself raised above the tantalizing power of perishing things. Duly mindful of these, it will be the sum of thy desires and the scope of thy endeavours, to gain the approbation of that Sovereign Being who will then fill the throne and pronounce the decisive sentence; thou wilt see nothing worth a wish,* in comparison of having his will for thy rule, his glory for thy aim, and the Holy Spirit for thy ever actuating principle.

Wonder, O man; be lost in admiration at those prodigious events which are coming upon the universe; events, the greatness of which nothing finite can measure; such as will cause whatever is considerable or momentous in the annals of all generations to sink into littleness and nothing; events (Jesus prepare us for their approach, defend us when

* Great day of dread, decision, and despair!
At thought of thee, each sublunary wish
Lets go its eager grasp, and quits the world.
Night Thoughts.

they take place!) big with the everlasting fates of all the living and the dead. I must see the graves cleaving, the sea teeming, and swarms unsuspected, crowds unnumbered, yea, multitudes of thronging nations, rising from both: I must see the world in flames, must stand at the dissolution of all terrestrial things, and be an attendant on the burial of nature: I must see the vast expanse of the sky wrapt up like a scroll, and the incarnate God issuing forth from light inaccessible, with ten thousand times ten thousand angels, to judge both men and devils: I must see the curtain of time drop, see all eternity disclosed to view, and enter upon a state of being that will never, never have an end.

And ought I not (let the vainest imagination determine, ought I not) to try the sincerity of my faith, and take heed to my ways? Is there an inquiry, is there a care, of greater, of equal, of comparable importance? Is not this an infinitely pressing call, to see that my loins are girded about, my lamp trimmed, and myself dressed for the bridegroom's appearance? that, washed in the fountain opened in my Saviour's side, and clad with the marriage-garment wove by his obedience, I may be found in peace, unblameable, and unreprovable. Otherwise how shall I stand with boldness when the stars of heaven fall from their orbs? How shall I come forth erect and courageous, when the earth itself reels to and fro like a drunkard?* How shall I look up with joy, and see my salvation drawing nigh, when the hearts of millions and millions fail for fear?

Now, madam, lest my meditations set in a cloud, and leave any unpleasing gloom upon your mind, let

* Isaiah xxiv. 20.

me once more turn to the brightening prospects of the righteous. A view of them and their delightful expectations may serve to exhilarate the thoughts, which have been musing upon melancholy subjects, and hovering about the edges of infernal darkness; just as a spacious field, arrayed in cheerful green, relieves and reinvigorates the eye which has fatigued itself by poring upon some minute, or gazing upon some glaring object.

The righteous seem to lie by, in the bosom of the earth, as a weary pilot in some well-sheltered creek, till all the storms which infest this lower world are blown over: here they enjoy safe anchorage, are in no danger of foundering amidst the waves of prevailing iniquity, or of being shipwrecked on the rocks of any powerful temptation. But ere long we shall behold them hoisting the flag of hope, riding before a sweet gale of atoning merit and redeeming love; till they make, with all the sails of an assured faith, the blessed port of eternal life.

Then, may the honoured friend to whom I am writing, rich in good works, rich in heavenly tempers, but inexpressibly richer in her Saviour's righteousness, O! may she enter the harbour like a gallant stately vessel, returned successful and victorious from some grand expedition, with acclamation, honour, and joy! while my little bark, attendant on the solemnity, and a partaker of the triumph, glides humbly after, and both rest together in the haven, the wished for, blissful haven, of perfect security and everlasting repose.

REFLECTIONS

ON

A FLOWER-GARDEN.

IN A LETTER TO A LADY.

MADAM,

SOME time ago, my meditations took a turn among the tombs: they visited the awful and melancholy mansions of the dead;* and you was pleased to favour them with your attention. May I now beg the honour of your company in a more inviting and delightful excursion?—in a beautiful flower-garden, where I lately walked, and at once regaled the sense and indulged the fancy.

It was early in a summer morning, when the air was cool, the earth moist, the whole face of the creation fresh and gay. The noisy world was scarce awake: business had not quite shook off his sound sleep, and riot had but just reclined his giddy head. All was serene, all was still; every thing tended to inspire tranquillity of mind, and invite to serious thought.*

* 'Discourses on the vanity of the creature, which represent the barrenness of every thing in this world, and its incapacity of producing any solid or substantial happiness, are useful. Those speculations also, which show the bright side of things, and lay forth those innocent entertainments, which are to be met with among the several objects that encompass us, are no less beneficial.'—Spec. vol. v. No. 393. Upon the plan of these observations the preceding and following reflections are formed

Only the wakeful lark had left her nest, and was mounting on high to salute the opening day. Elevated in air, she seemed to call the laborious husbandman to his toil, and all her fellow-songsters to their notes. Earliest of birds, said I, companion of the dawn, may I always rise at thy voice! rise to offer the matin-song, and adore that beneficent Being, 'who maketh the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice.'

How charming to rove abroad at this sweet hour of prime, to enjoy the calm of nature, to tread the dewy lawns, and taste the unrifled freshness of the air!

> Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
> With charm of earliest birds.

What a pleasure do the sons of sloth lose! Little, ah! little is the sluggard sensible how delicious an entertainment he foregoes, for the poorest of all animal gratifications.*

The grayness of the dawn decays gradually. Abundance of ruddy streaks tinge the fleeces of the firmament, till at length the dappled aspect of the east is lost in one ardent and boundless blush. Is it the surmise of imagination or do the skies really redden with shame, to see so many supinely stretched on their

* See! how revelation and reason, the Scriptures and the classics, unanimously exhort to this most beneficial practice. They both invite us to early rising by the most engaging motives and the most alluring representations.

'Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages. Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth.'—Cant. vii. 11, 12.

> Luciferi primo cum sidere, frigida rura
> Carpamus: dum mane novum, dum gramina canent,
> Et ros in tenera pecori gratissimus herba est.
> *Virg. Georg.* iii.

drowsy pillows? Shall man be lost in luxurious ease? Shall man waste these precious hours in idle slumbers, while the vigorous sun is up, and going on his Maker's errand? while all the feathered choir are hymning the Creator, and paying their homage in harmony? No; let him heighten the melody of the tuneful tribes by adding the rational strains of devotion; let him improve the fragrant oblations of nature by mingling with the rising odours the more refined breath of praise.

'Tis natural for man to look upwards, to throw his first glance upon the objects that are above him.

> Straight towards heav'n my wandering eyes I turn'd,
> And gaz'd a while the ample sky.

Prodigious theatre! where lightnings dart their fire, and thunders utter their voice; where tempests spend their rage, and worlds unnumbered roll at large! O the greatness of that mighty hand, which meteth out this amazing circumference with a span! O the immensity of that wonderful Being, before whom this unmeasurable extent is no more than a point! And O (thou pleasing thought!) the unsearchable riches of that mercy which is greater than the heavens![*] is more enlarged and extensive in its gracious exercise, than these illimitable tracts of air, and sea, and firmament! which pardons crimes of the most enormous size and the most horrid aggravations; pardons them in consideration of the Redeemer's atonement, with perfect freeness and the utmost readiness! more, readily, if it were possible, than this all-surrounding expanse admits within its circuit a ridge of mountains, or even a grain of sand.

Come hither, then ye awakened, trembling sinners;

* Psal. cviii. 4.

come,* weary and heavy-laden with a sense of your iniquities, condemn yourselves; renounce all reliance on any thing of your own; let your trust be in the tender mercy of God for ever and ever.

'In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun.'† Behold him coming forth from the chambers of the east; see the clouds, like floating curtains, are thrown back at his approach. With what refulgent majesty does he walk abroad! how transcendently bright is his countenance, shedding day and inexhaustible light through the universe! Is there a scene, though finished by the most elaborate and costly refinements of art, 'comparable to these illustrious solemnities of opening sunshine? Before these all the studied pageantry of the theatre, the glittering economy of an assembly, or even the heightened ornaments of a royal palace, hide their diminished heads and shrink into nothing.' I have read of a person so struck with the

* The lines which follow are admirably descriptive of the spirit and practice hinted above; in them desire pants, prayer wrestles, and faith as it were grasps the prize. I take leave to transplant them into this place; and I could wish them a better, a more conspicuous situation, than either their new or their native soil. Their native soil is no other than 'The Lamentations of a Sinner,' written by Mr. Sternhold. Notwithstanding the unpromising genius of the performance, I think we may challange the greatest masters to produce any thing more spirited and importunate, more full of nature, or more flushed with life.

Mercy, good Lord, mercy I crave;
This is the total sum;
For mercy, Lord, is all my suit:
Lord, let thy mercy come.

The short sentences, not a single copulative; the frequent repetition of the divine name; the almost incessant reiteration of the blessing so passionately desired, and inexpressibly needed;—this is the genuine language of ardour; these are beauties obvious to every eye, and cannot fail, either to please the judicious taste, or to edify the gracious heart.

† Psal. xix. 4.

splendours of this noble luminary, that he imagined himself made on purpose to contemplate its glories. O! that Christians would adopt his persuasion, and transfer it to the Sun of Righteousness! Thus applied, it would cease to be a chimerical notion, and become a most important truth. For sure I am, it is the supreme happiness of the eternal state, and therefore may well be the ruling concern of this present life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. Nor do I stand alone in this opinion. The very best judge of whatever is valuable in science, or perfective of our nature; a judge who formed his taste on the maxims of paradise, and received the finishings of his education in the third heavens; this judge determines to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. He possessed in his own person the finest, the most admired accomplishments, yet pronounces them no better than dung, in comparison of the super-eminent excellency of this saving knowledge.*

Methinks I discern a thousand admirable properties in the sun. 'Tis certainly the best material emblem of the Creator. There is more of God in its lustre, energy, and usefulness, than in any other visible being. To worship it as a deity was the least inexcusable of all the heathen idolatries. One scarce can wonder that fallen reason should mistake so fair a copy for the adorable Original. No comparison in the whole book of sacred wisdom pleases me more, than that which resembles the blessed Jesus to yonder regent of the day,† who now advances on his

* Phil. iii. 8.

† Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings. Mal. iv. 2.

azure road to scatter light and dispense gladness through the nations.

What were all the realms of the world, but a dungeon of darkness, without the beams of the sun? all their fine scenes hid from our view, lost in obscurity. In vain we roll around our eyes in the midnight gloom: in vain we strive to behold the features of amiable nature. Turn whither we will, no form or comeliness appears; all seems a dreary waste, an undistinguished chaos, till the returning hours have unbarred the gates of light, and let forth the morn. Then, what a prospect opens! The heavens are paved with azure, and strewed with roses. A variety of the liveliest verdures array the plains. The flowers put on a glow of the richest colours. The whole creation stands forth, dressed in all the charms of beauty. The ravished eye looks round and wonders.

And what had been the condition of our intellectual nature without the great Redeemer, and his divine revelation? Alas! what absurd and unworthy apprehensions did the Pagan sages form of God! What idle dreams, what childish conjectures, were their doctrines of a future state! How did the bulk even of that favoured nation the Jews, weary themselves in every vanity to obtain peace and reconciliation with their offended Jehovah! till Jesus arose upon our benighted minds, and brought life and immortality to light: till he arose to enlighted the wretched Gentiles, and to be the glory of his people Israel.

Now we no longer cry out with a restless impatience, 'Where is God my Maker?' for we are allowed to contemplate the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now we no longer inquire with an unsatisfied solicitude, 'Which is the way to bliss?' because Jesus has marked the path by his shining example, and left us an unerring clue in his holy word. Now, we have no more reason to proceed with misgiving hearts in our journey to eternity, or to ask anxiously as we go, 'Who will roll away the stone, and open the everlasting doors? Who will remove the flaming sword, and give us admission into the delights of Paradise?' for it is done, all done, by the Captain of our salvation. Sin he has expiated by the unblemished sacrifice of himself: the law he has fulfilled by his perfect obedience: the sinner he transforms by his sanctifying Spirit: in a word, he hath both presented us with a clear discovery of good things to come, and administered to us an abundant entrance into the final enjoyment of them.

Whenever, therefore, we bless God for the circling seasons and revolving day, let us adore, thankfully adore him for the more precious appearance of the Sun of Righteousness, and his glorious gospel, without which we should have been groping, even to this hour, in spiritual darkness and the shadow of death; without which we must have wandered in a maze of inextricable uncertainties, and have 'stumbled upon the dark mountains of error, till we fell into the bottomless pit of perdition.

Without that grand enlivening principle, what were this earth, but a lifeless mass, a rude lump of inactive matter? The trees could never break forth into leaves nor the plants spring up into flowers: we should no more behold the meadows mantled over with green, nor the valleys standing thick with corn: or, to speak in the beautiful language of a prophet,

'No longer would the fig-tree blossom, nor fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive would fail, and the fields could yield no meat; the flocks must be cut off from the fold, and there would be no herd in the stalls.'* The sun darts its beams among all the vegetable tribes, and paints the spring and enriches the autumn; this pierces to the roots of the vineyard and the orchard, and sets afloat those fermenting juices which at length burst into floods of wine, or bend the boughs with a mellow load. Nor are its favours confined to the upper regions, but distributed unto the deepest recesses of creation. It penetrates the beds of metal, and finds its way to the place of the sapphires: it tinctures the seeds of gold that are ripening into ore, and throws a brilliancy into the water of the diamond that is hardening on its rock: in short, the beneficial agency of this magnificent luminary is inexpressible; it beautifies and impregnates universal nature; 'there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.'

Just in the same manner were the rational world dead in trespasses and sins, without the reviving energy of Jesus Christ. He is the 'Resurrection and the Life;' the overflowing fountain of the one, and the all-powerful cause of the other. The second Adam is a quickening Spirit, and all his saints live through him. He shines upon their affections, and they shoot forth into heavenly graces, and abound in the fruits of righteousness. Faith unfeigned, and love undissembled, those noblest productions of the renewed nature, are the effects of his operation on the mind. Not so much as one divine disposition could spread itself, not one Christian habit unfold

* Hab. iii. 17.

and flourish, without the kindly influence, of his grace.

As there is no fruitfulness, so likewise no cheerfulness, without the sun.* When that auspicious sovereign of the day diffuses the mildness of his morning splendour, he creates an universal festival. Millions of glittering insects awake into existence, and bask in his rays: the birds start from their slumbers, and pour their delighted souls in harmony, the flocks with bleating accents hail the welcome blessing: the valleys ring with rural music; the hills echo back the artless strains: all that is vocal joins in their general choir; all that has breath exults in the cheering influence. Whereas, was that radiant orb extinguished, a tremendous gloom would ensue, and horror insupportable. Nay, let it only be eclipsed for a few minutes, and all nature assumes an air of sadness; the heavens are wrapt in sables, and put on a kind of mourning; the most sprightly animals hang down their dejected heads; the songsters of the grove are struck dumb; howling beasts roam abroad for prey; ominous birds come forth and screech; the heart of man fails, or a sudden pang seizes the foreboding mind. So, when Christ hides away his face, when faith loses sight of that consolation of Israel, how gloomy are the prospects of the soul! Our God seems to be a consuming fire, and our sins cry loudly for vengeance: the thoughts bleed inwardly; the Christian walks heavily; all without is irksome, all within is disconsolate. Lift up then, most gracious Jesus, thou noble day-spring from on high! O lift up

* 'The sun, which is the great soul of the universe, and produces all the necessaries of life, has a particular influence in cheering the mind of man and making the heart glad. Spect. vol. v. No. 387

the light of thy countenance upon thy people! Reveal the fulness of thy mediatorial sufficiency; make clear our title to this great salvation, and thereby impart

> What nothing earthly gives or can destroy,
> The souls calm sunshine, and the heart-felt joy.*

In one instance more let me pursue the similitude. The sun, I observe, pours his lustre all around, to every distance and in every direction; profusely liberal of his gifts, he illuminates and cheers all the ends of the earth and the whole compass of the skies; the east reddens with his rising radiance, and the western hills are gilded with his streaming splendours; the chilly regions of the north are cherished by his genial warmth, while the southern tracts glow with his fire. Thus are the influences of the Sun of Righteousness diffusive and unconfined; the generations of old felt them, and generations yet unborn will rejoice in them; the merits of his precious death extended to the first and will be propagated to the last ages of mankind. May they, ere long visit the remotest climates and darkest corners of the earth! Command thy gospel, blessed Jesus, thy everlasting gospel, to take the wings of the morning and travel with yonder sun; let it fly upon strong pinions among every people, nation, and language; that where the heat scorches and the cold freezes, thou mayest be known, confessed, and adored! that strangers to thy name and enemies to thy doctrine may be enlightened with the knowledge and won to the love of thy truth! O! may that best of eras come, that wished-for period advance, when all the ends of the world shall remember themselves and be turned unto the

* Pope's Eth. Ep.

Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations worship before him!*

From the heavens we retire to the earth. Here the drops of dew, like so many liquid crystals,† sparkle upon the eye. How brilliant and unsullied is their lustre! How little inferior to the proud stone which irradiates a monarch's crown! They want nothing but solidity and permanency to equal them with the finest treasures of the jeweller's casket. Here it must be confessed they are greatly deficient. Short-lived ornaments, possessed of little more than a momentary radiance; the sun that lights them up will soon melt them into air, or exhale them into vapours; within another hour we may 'look for their place and they shall be away.' O! may every good resolution of mine and of my flock's, may our united breathings after God, not be like these transient decorations of the morning, but like the substantial glory of the growing day! The one shines more and more with augmented splendours; while the other, having glittered gaily for a few moments, disappear and are lost.

How sensibly has this dew refreshed the vegetable kingdom! The fervent heat of yesterday's sun had almost parched the face and exhausted the sweets of nature. But what a sovereign restorative are these cooling distillations of the night! How they gladden and invigorate the languishing herbs! Sprinkled with these reviving drops, their verdure deepens, their bloom is new flushed; their fragrance faint or intermitted, becomes potent and copious. Thus does the

* Psal. xxii. 27.

† Now morn, her rosy steps in th' eastern clime
Advancing, sow'd the earth with orient pearl.—*Milt*

ever-blessed Spirit revive the drooping troubled conscience of a sinner. When that Almighty Comforter sheds his sweet influence on the soul, displays the all-sufficient sacrifice of a Divine Redeemer, and 'witnesses with our spirit,' that we are interested in the Saviour, and by this means are children of God; then what a pleasing change ensues! Former anxieties are remembered no more; every uneasy apprehension vanishes; soothing hopes and delightful expectations succeed; the countenance drops its dejected mien; the eyes brighten with a lively cheerfulness; while the lips express the heartfelt satisfaction in the language of thanksgiving and the voice of melody. In this sense, merciful God, be as the dew unto Israel! 'Pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing.' And O! let not my fleece be dry while heavenly benediction descends upon all around.

Who can number these pearly drops? They hang on every hedge, they twinkle from every spray, and adorn the whole herbage of the field. Not a blade of grass, not a single leaf, but wears the watery pendants; so vast is the profusion, that it baffles the arithmetician's art. Here let the benevolent mind contemplate and admire that emphatical Scripture, which from this elegant similitude describes the increase of the Messiah's kingdom. The royal prophet, speaking of Christ, and foretelling the success of his religion, has this remarkable expression;* 'the dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning;' (i. e) As the morning is the mother of dews, produces them as it were from a prolific womb, and scatters them with the most lavish abundance over all the surface of the earth: so shall thy seed be, O thou everlasting

* Psal. cx. 3.

Father! By the preaching of thy word shall such an innumerable race of regenerate children be born unto Thee, and prove an ornament and a blessing to all ages. Millions, millions of willing converts from every nation under heaven shall crowd into thy family, and replenish thy church; till they become like the stars of the sky or the sands of the sea for multitude, or even as numberless as these fine spangles which now cover the face of nature. Behold, then, ye obstinately wicked, though you 'are not gathered, yet will the Saviour be glorious.' His design shall not miscarry, nor his labour prove abortive, though ye render it of none effect with regard to yourselves; think not that Immanuel will want believers, or heaven inhabitants, because you continue incorrigible. No, the Lamb that was slain will 'see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied,' in a never-failing series of faithful people below, and an immense choir of glorified saints above, who shall form his retinue and surround his throne in shining and triumphant armies, such as no man can number.

Here I was reminded of the various expedients which Providence, unsearchably wise, uses to fructify both the material and intellectual world. Sometimes you shall have impetuous and heavy showers bursting from the angry clouds: they lash the plains and make the rivers foam: a storm brings them, and a deluge follows them. At other times these gentle dews are formed in the serene evening air: they steal down by slow degrees and with insensible stillness; so subtile that they deceive the nicest eye; so silent that they escape the most delicate ear; and when fallen, so very light, that they neither bruise the tenderest nor oppress the weakest flower. Very different operations!

yet each concurs in the same beneficial end, and both impart fertility to the lap of nature.

So some persons have I known reclaimed from the unfruitful works of darkness by violent and severe means. The Almighty addressed their stubborn hearts as he addressed the Israelites at Sinai, with lightning in his eyes and thunder in his voice. The conscience, smit with a sense of guilt, and apprehensive of eternal vengeance, trembled through all her powers; just as that strong mountain tottered to its centre; pangs of remorse and agonies of fear preceded their new birth; they were reduced to the last extremities, almost overwhelmed with despair before they found rest in Jesus Christ. Others have been recovered from a vain conversation by methods more mild and attractive. The Father of spirits applied himself to their teachable minds in 'a still and small voice:' his grace came down as the rain into a fleece of wool, or as those softening drops which now water the earth. The kingdom of God took place in their souls without noise or observation. They passed from death unto life, from a carnal to a regenerate state, by almost imperceptible advances; the transition resembled the growth of corn; was very visible when effected, though scarce sensible while accomplishing. O thou Author and Finisher of our faith, recal us from our wanderings and re-unite us to Thyself! Whether Thou alarm us with thy terrors or allure us with thy smiles; whether Thou drive us with the scourge of conviction or draw us with the cords of love: let us in any-wise return to Thee, for Thou art our supreme good, Thou art our only happiness.

Before I proceed farther, let me ascend the terrace and take one survey of the neighbouring country.

What a prospect rushes upon my sight! How vast, how various, how 'full and plenteous with all manner of store!' Nature's whole wealth! What a rich and inexhaustible magazine is here, furnishing subsistence for every creature! Methinks I read in these spacious volumes a most lively comment upon that noble celebration of the divine beneficence; 'He openeth his hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness.'

These are thy glorious works, Parent of Good,
Almighty! Thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair! Thyself how wondrous then!—*Milton.*

The fields are covered deep, and stand thick with corn. They expand the milky grain to the sun, while the gales, now inclining, now raising each flexible stem, open all their ranks to the agency of his beams; which will soon impart a firm consistence to the grain, and a glossy golden hue to the ear, that they may be qualified to fill the barns of the husbandman with plenty and his heart with gladness.

Yonder lie the meadows, smoothed into a perfect level, decorated with an embroidery of the gayest flowers, and loaded with spontaneous crops of herbage; which, converted into hay, will prove a most commodious provision for the barrenness of winter, will supply with fodder our serviceable animals, when all the verdure of the plain is killed by frosts or buried in snows. A winding stream glides along the flowery margin, and receives the image of the bending skies, and waters the roots of many a branching willow: 'tis stocked, no doubt with a variety of fish, which afford a solitary diversion to the angler, and nourish for his table a delicious treat; nor is it the only merit of this liquid element to maintain the finny nations; it also

carries cleanliness and dispenses fruitfulness wherever it rolls the crystal current.

The pastures with their verdant mounds chequer the prospect, and prepare a standing repast for our cattle; there 'our oxen are made strong to labour and our sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands;' there the horse acquires vigour for the dispatch of our business, and speed to expedite our journeys. From thence the kine bring home their udders distended with one of the richest and healthiest liquors in the world.

On several spots, a grove of trees, like some grand colonade, erects its towering head; every one projects a friendly shade for the beasts, and creates an hospitable lodging for the birds; every one stands ready to furnish timber for a palace, masts for a navy, or, with a more condescending courtesy, fuel for our hearths. One of them seems skirted with a wild uncultivated heath, which, like well-disposed shades in painting, throws an additional lustre on the more ornamented parts of the landscape. Nor is its usefulness, like that of a foil, relative only, but real. There several valuable creatures are produced and accommodated, without any expense or care of ours. There likewise spring abundance of those herbs which assuage the smart of our wounds, and allay the fiery tumults of the fever; which impart floridity to our circulating fluids, and a more vigorous tone to our active solids, and thereby repair the decays of our enfeebled constitutions.

Nearer the houses we perceive an ample spread of branches, not so stately as the oak's, but more amiable for their annual services; a little while ago I beheld them, and all was one beauteous boundless waste of

blossoms; the eye marvelled at the lovely sight, and the heart rejoiced in the prospect of autumnal plenty; but now the blooming maid is resigned for the useful matron; the flower is fallen, and the fruit swells out on every twig. Breathe soft, ye winds! O, spare the tender fruitage, ye surly blasts! Let the pear-tree suckle her juicy progeny, till they drop into our hands and dissolve in our mouths; let the plum hang unmolested upon her boughs, till she fatten her delicious flesh, and cloud her polished skin with blue; and as for the apples, that staple commodity of our orchards, let no injurious shocks precipitate them immaturely to the ground, till revolving suns have tinged them with a ruddy complexion, and concocted them into an exquisite flavour. Then, what copious hoards, of what burnished rinds and delightful relishes, will replenish the store-room! Some to present us with an early entertainment, and refresh our palates amidst the sultry heats: some to borrow ripeness from the falling snows, and carry autumn into the depths of winter. Some to adorn the salver, make a part of the dessert, and give an agreeable close to our feasts. Others to fill our vats with a foaming flood, which, mellowed by age, may sparkle in the glass with a liveliness and delicacy little inferior to the blood of the grape.

I observe several small inclosures, which seem to be apprehensive of some hostile visit from the north, and therefore are defended on that quarter by a thick wood or a lofty wall; at the same time they cultivate an uninterrupted correspondence with the south, and throw open their whole dimensions to its friendly warmth. One in particular lies within the reach of a distinguishing view, and proves to be a kitchen-

garden; it looks, methinks, like a plain and frugal republic. Whatever may resemble the pomp of courts or the ensigns of royalty is banished from this humble community. None of the productions of the olitory affect finery, but are all habited with the very perfection of decency. Here those celebrated qualities are eminently united, the utmost simplicity with the exactest neatness. A skilful hand has parcelled out the whole ground into narrow beds and intervening alleys. The same discreet management has assigned to each verdant family a peculiar and distinct abode; so that there is no confusion amidst the great multiplicity, because every individual knows its proper home, and all the tribes are ranged with proper regularity. If it be pleasing to behold their orderly situation and their modest beauties, how much more delightful to consider the advantages they yield! What a fund of choice accommodations is here! What a source of wholesome dainties! And all for the enjoyment of man. Why does the parsley, with her frizzled locks, shag the border; or why the celery, with her whitening arms, perforate the mould, but to render his soups savoury? The asparagus shoots its tapering stems to offer him the first-fruits of the season; and the artichoke spreads its turgid top to give him a treat of vegetable marrow. The tendrils of the cucumber creep into the sun; and, though basking in its hottest rays, they secrete for their master, and barrel up for his use the most cooling juices of the soil. The beans stand firm like files of embattled troops; the peas rest upon their props like so many companies of invalids, while both replenish their pods with the fatness of the earth on purpose to pour it on their owner's table. Not one species,

among all this variety of herbs, is a cumberer of the ground. Not a single plant but is good for food, or some way salutary. With so beneficent an economy are the several periods of their ministration settled, that no portion of the year is left destitute of nourishing esculents. What is still more obliging, every portion of the year affords such esculents as are best suited to the temperature of the air and the state of our bodies. Why then should the possessor of so valuable a spot envy the condition of kings? since he may daily walk amidst rows of peaceable and obsequious, though mute subjects; every one of which renders him some agreeable present, and pays him a willing tribute, such as is most happily adapted both to supply his wants and to regale his taste; to furnish him at once with plenty and with pleasure.

At a distance one descries the mighty hills; they heave their huge ridges among the clouds, and look like the barriers of kingdoms or the boundaries of nature. Bare and deformed as their surface may appear, their bowels are fraught with inward treasures! treasures lodged fast in the quarries, or sunk deep in the mines. From thence industry may draw her implements to plough the soil, to reap the grain, and procure every necessary convenience. From thence art may fetch her materials to rear the dome, to swell the organ, and form the noblest ornaments of politer life.

On another side the great deep terminates the view. There go the ships: there is that leviathan: and there, in that world of waters, an inconceivable number of animals have their habitation. This is the capacious cistern of the universe: which admits, as into a receptacle, and distributes, as from a reservoir, what-

ever waters the whole globe. There's not a fountain that gushes in the unfrequented desert, nor a rivulet that flows in the remotest continent, nor a cloud that swims in the highest regions of the firmament, but is fed by this all-replenishing source. The ocean is the grand vehicle of trade, and the uniter of distant nations. To us it is peculiarly kind, not only as it wafts into our ports the harvests of every climate, and renders our island the centre of traffic, but also as it secures us from foreign invasions by a sort of impregnable entrenchment.*

Methinks the view of this profuse munificence inspires a secret delight, and kindles a disinterested good-will. While the 'little hills clap their hands,' and the luxuriant 'valleys laugh and sing;' who can forbear catching the general joy? who is not touched with lively sensations of pleasure? While the Everlasting Father is scattering blessings through his whole family, and crowning the year with his goodness; who does not feel his breast overflowing with a diffusive benevolence? My heart, I must confess,

* Whose rampart was the sea.—Nahum iii. 8.
I hope this little excursion into the country will not be looked upon as a departure from my subject; because a rural view, though no essential part of a garden, is yet a desirable appendage, and necessary to complete its beauty. As usefulness is the most valuable property which can attend upon any production, this is the circumstance chiefly touched upon in the survey of the landscape. Though every piece of this extensive and diversified scene is cast in the most elegant mould, yet nothing is calculated merely for show and parade. You see nothing formed in the taste of the ostentatious obelisk, or insignificant pomp of the pyramid. No such idle expenses were admitted into that consummate plan, which regulated the structure of the universe. All the decorations of nature are no less advantageous than ornamental; such as speak the Maker infinitely beneficent, as well as incomparably magnificent.

beats high with satisfaction, and breathes out congratulatory wishes upon all the tenants of these rural abodes; 'peace be within your walls, as well as plenteousness around your dwellings.' Live, ye highly favoured, live sensible of your benefits, and thankful to your Benefactor. Look round upon these prodigiously large incomes of the fruitful soil, and call them (for you have free leave) all your own. Only let me remind you of one very important truth. Let me suggest, and may you never forget, that you are obliged to Christ Jesus for every one of these accommodations which spring from the teeming earth and the smiling skies.

1. Christ* made them when they were not. He fetched them from utter darkness, and gave them both their being and their beauty. He created the

* When I ascribe the work of creation to the Son, I would by no means be supposed to withhold the same honour from the Eternal Father and Ever-blessed Spirit. The acts of those inconceivably glorious persons are, like their essence, undivided and one. But I choose to state the point in this manner, because this is the manifest doctrine of the New Testament; is the express belief of our church; and a most noble peculiarity of the Gospel Revelation. I choose it also, because I would take every opportunity of inculcating and celebrating the Divinity of the Redeemer; a truth which imparts an unutterable dignity to Christianity; a truth, which lays an immovable foundation for all the comfortable hopes of a Christian; a truth, which will render the mystery of our redemption, the wonder and delight of eternity; and with this truth, every one will observe, my assertion is inseparably connected.

If any one questions whether this be the doctrine of our church, let the creed, which we repeat in our most solemn devotions, determine his doubt: 'I believe,' says that form of sound words, 'in one Lord Jesus Christ, very God of very God, by whom all things were made.' If it be farther inquired, from whence the Nicene Fathers derived this article of their faith? I answer from the writings of the beloved disciple who lay on the Saviour's bosom, and of that great apostle who had been caught up in the third heaven. John i. 3. Col. i. 16

materials of which they are composed, and moulded them into this endless multiplicity of amiable forms and useful substances. He arrayed the heavens with a vesture of the mildest blue, and clothed the earth in a livery of the gayest green. His pencil streaked, and his breath perfumed, whatever is beautiful or fragrant in the universe. His strength set fast the mountains; His goodness garnished the vales; and the same touch which healed the leper, wrought the whole visible system into this complete perfection.

2. Christ recovered them when they were forfeited. By Adam's sin we lost our right to the comforts of life and fruits of the ground. His disobedience was the most impious and horrid treason against the King of kings. Consequently his whole patrimony became confiscated: as well the portion of temporal good things settled upon the human race during their minority, as that everlasting heritage reserved for their enjoyment when they should come to full age. But the 'Seed of the woman' instantly interposing, took off the attainder, and redeemed the alienated inheritance. The first Adam being disinherited, the second Adam* was appointed heir of all things, visible

* Heb. i. 2. In this sense at least, Christ is the Saviour of all men. The former and latter rain; the precious fruits of the earth; food to eat, and raiment to put on;—all these he purchased, even for his irreclaimable enemies. They ate of his bread, who lift up their heel against Him.

We learn from hence, in what a peculiar and endearing light the Christian is to contemplate the things that are seen. Heathens might discover an eternal power and infinite wisdom in the structure of the universe; heathens might acknowledge a most stupendous liberality in the unreserved grant of the whole fabric, with all its furniture, to the service of man: but the Christian should ever keep in mind his forfeiture of them, and the price paid to redeem them. He should receive the gifts of indulgent Providence, as the Israelites received their law, from the hand of a Mediator

as well as invisible. And we hold our possession of the former, we expect an instatement in the latter, purely by virtue of our alliance to Him, and our union with him.

3. Christ upholds them, which would otherwise tumble into ruin. By Him, says the Oracle of Inspiration, all things consist. His finger rolls the seasons round, and presides over all the celestial revolutions. His finger winds up the wheels, and impels every spring of vegetative nature. In a word, the whole weight of the creation rests upon his mighty arm, and receives the whole harmony of its motion from his unerring eye. This habitable globe, with all its rich appendages and fine machinery, could no more continue than they could create themselves. Start they would into instant confusion, or drop into their primitive nothing, did not his power support, and his wisdom regulate them every moment. In conformity to his will, they subsist stedfast and invariable in their orders, and wait only for his sovereign nod, to 'fall away like water that runneth apace.'

4. Christ* actuates them, which would otherwise be lifeless and insignificant. Pensioners they are, constant pensioners on his bounty; and borrow their all from his fulness. He only has life; and whatever

Or rather, to him they come, not only issuing from the stores of an unbounded bounty, but swimming (as it were) in that crimson tide which streamed from Immanuel's veins.

* John v. 17. My Father worketh hitherto, and I work: or, I exert that unremitting and unwearied energy which is the life of the creation. Thus the words are paraphrased by a masterly expositor, who has illustrated the life of our blessed Lord in the most elegant taste of criticism, with the most amiable spirit of devotion, and without any mixture of the malignant leaven or low singularities of a party. See the Family Expositor, vol. i. sect. 47.

operates, operates by an emanation from his all-sufficiency. Does the grape refresh you with its enlivening juices? It is by a warrant received, and virtue derived, from the Redeemer. Does bread strengthen your heart, and prove the staff of your life? Remember, that it is by the Saviour's appointment and through the efficacy of his operation. You are charmed with his melody, when the 'time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the nightingale is heard in your land.' You taste his goodness in the luscious fig, the melting peach, and the musky flavour of the apricot. You smell his sweetness in the opening honeysuckle and every odoriferous shrub.

Could these creatures speak for themselves, they would doubtless disclaim all sufficiency of their own, and ascribe the whole honour to their Maker. 'We are servants,' would they say, 'of Him who died for you. Cisterns only, dry cisterns in ourselves, we transmit to mortals no more than the uncreated fountain transfuses into us. Think not that from any ability of our own we furnish you with assistance, or administer to your comfort. 'Tis the divine energy, the divine energy alone that works in us and does you good. We serve you, O ye sons of men, that you may love Him who placed us in these stations. O! love the Lord, therefore, all ye who are supported by our ministry, or else we shall* groan with indignation and regret at your abuse of our services. Use us, and welcome, for we are yours, if ye are Christ's. Crop our choicest beauties; rifle all our treasures; accommodate yourselves with our most valuable qualities; only let us be in-

* Rom. viii. 12.

centives to your gratitude, and motives to your obedience.'

Having surveyed the spacious sky, and sent a glance round the inferior creation; 'tis time to descend from this eminence, and confine my attention to the beautiful spot below.—Here Nature, always pleasing, every where lovely, appears with peculiar attractions. Yonder she seems dressed in her dishabille; grand, but irregular; here, she calls in her handmaid Art, and shines in all the delicate ornaments which the nicest cultivation is able to convey. Those are her common apartments where she lodges her ordinary guests; this is her cabinet of curiosities, where she entertains her intimate acquaintance. My eye shall often expatiate over those scenes of universal fertility: my feet shall sometimes brush through the thicket, or traverse the lawn, or stroll along the forest glade: but to this delightful retreat shall be my chief resort. Thither will I make excursions, but here will I dwell.

If, from my low procedure, I may form an allusion to the most exalted practices, I would observe upon this occasion, that the celebrated Erasmus, and our judicious Locke, having trod the circle of the sciences, and ranged through the whole extent of human literature, at length betook themselves solely to the Bible. Leaving the sages of antiquity, they sat incessantly at the feet of Jesus. Wisely they withdrew from that immense multiplicity of learning, from those endless tracts of amusing erudition, where noxious weeds are mixed with wholesome herbs, where is generally a much larger growth of prickly shrubs than of fruitful boughs. They spent their most mature hours in those hallowed gardens which

God's own wisdom planted; which God's own Spirit watereth; and in which God's own Son is continually walking; where he meeteth those that seek Him, and revealeth to them the glories of his person and the riches of his goodness.

Thus would I finish the remainder of my days! Having just tasted (what they call) the politer studies, I would now devote my whole application to the lively oracles. From other pursuits I might glean perhaps a few scattered fragments of low, of lean, of unsatisfactory instruction. From this, I trust to reap a harvest of the sublimest truths, the noblest improvements, and the purest joys. Waft me then, O! waft my mind to Sion's consecrated bowers. Let my thoughts perpetually rove through the awfully-pleasing walks of inspiration. Here grow those heaven-born plants, the trees of life and knowledge, whose ambrosial fruits we may now 'take and eat, and live for ever.' Here flow those precious streams of grace and righteousness, whose living waters 'whosoever drinks shall thirst no more.' And, what can the fables of Grecian song, or the finest pages of Roman eloquence—what can they exhibit in any degree comparable to these matchless prerogatives of Revelation? Therefore, though I should not dislike to pay a visit now and then to my heathen masters, I would live with the prophets and apostles. With those, I would carry on some occasional correspondence; but these should be my bosom-friends, my inseparable companions, 'my delight, and my counsellors.'

What sweets are these, which so agreeably salute my nostrils? They are the breath of the flowers, the incense of the garden. How liberally does the jes-

samine dispense her odoriferous riches! How deliciously has the woodbine embalmed this morning walk! The air is all perfume. And is not this and other most engaging argument to forsake the bed of sloth! Who would lie dissolved in senseless slumbers, while so many breathing sweets invite him to a feast of fragrancy? Especially considering, that the advancing day will exhale the volatile dainties. A fugitive treat they are, prepared only for the wakeful and industrious: whereas, when the sluggard lifts his heavy eyes, the flowers will droop, their fine scents be dissipated, and instead of this refreshing humidity, the air will become a kind of liquid fire.

With this very motive, heightened by a representation of the most charming pieces of morning scenery, the parent of mankind awakes his lovely consort. There is such a delicacy in the choice, and so much life in the description, of these rural images, that I cannot excuse myself without repeating the whole passage. Whisper it, some friendly genius, in the ear of every one who is now sunk in sleep, and lost to all these refined gratifications!

> Awake! the morning shines, and the fresh field
> Calls you: ye lose the prime, to mark how spring
> The tended plants, how blows the citron grove;
> What drops the myrrh, and what the balmy reed;
> How nature paints her colours; how the bee
> Sits on the bloom extracting liquid sweets.*

How delightful is this fragrance! It is distributed in the nicest proportion; neither so strong as to oppress the organs, nor so faint as to elude them. We are soon cloyed at a sumptuous banquet; but this pleasure never loses its poignancy, never palls the appetite. Here luxury itself is innocent; or rather,

* Milt. Par. Lost, b. v. 20.

in this case, indulgence is incapable of excess. This balmy entertainment not only regales the sense, but cheers the very soul;* and, instead of clogging, elates its powers. It puts me in mind of that ever-memorable sacrifice which was once made in behalf of offending mortals. I mean the sacrifice of the blessed Jesus, when He offered up himself to God 'for a sweet-smelling savour.' Such the Holy Spirit styles that wonderful oblation; as if no image in the whole sensible creation was so proper to give us an idea of the ineffable satisfaction which the Father of Mercies conceived from that unparalleled atonement, as the pleasing sensations which such rich perfumes are capable of raising. 'Thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil,' from an apostate world, the most submissive acknowledgments, added to the most costly offerings, from men of defiled hands and unclean lips, what could they have effected? A prophet represents the 'High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity,' turning himself away from such filthy rags, turning himself away with a disdainful abhorrence,† as from the noisome steams of a dunghill; but in Christ's immaculate holiness, in Christ's consummate obedience, in Christ's most precious blood-shedding, with what unimaginable complacency does justice rest satisfied, and vengeance acquiesce! All thy works, O thou surety for ruined sinners! all thy sufferings, O thou slaughtered Lamb of God! as well as all thy garments, O thou bridegroom of thy church! smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia!‡ They are infinitely more grateful to the eternal Godhead, than the choicest exhalations of

* Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart. Prov. xxvii. 9.
† Amos v. 21 . ‡ Psalm xlv. 8.

the garden, than all the odours of the spicy east, can be to the human nostrils.

As the altar of old sanctified the gift, so this is the great propitiation which recommends the obnoxious persons and unprofitable services of the believing world; in this may my soul be interested! by this may it be reconciled to the Father! There is such a leprous depravity cleaving to my nature, as pollutes whatever I perform: my most profound adorations and sincerest acts of religion must not presume to challenge a reward, but humbly implore forgiveness:* renouncing therefore myself in every instance of duty, disclaiming all shadow of confidence in any deeds of my own, may I now and evermore be accepted through the Beloved!

What colours, what charming colours are here! these so nobly bold, and those so delicately languid! what a glow is enkindled in some, what a gloss shines upon others! in one, methinks, I see the ruby with her bleeding radiance, in another the sapphire with her sky-tinctured blue, in all such an exquisite richness of dyes, as no other set of paintings in the universe can boast.† With what a masterly skill is

* A writer of distinguished superiority thus addresses the great Observer of actions and Searcher of hearts, and vindicates my sentiments while he so justly and beautifully utters his own:

Look down, great God, with pity's softest eye,
On a poor breathing particle of dust.
His crimes forgive, forgive his virtues too,
Those smaller faults, half converts to the right.
Night Thoughts, N. Ix

† ——— Who can paint
Like nature? Can imagination boast,
Amid his gay creation, hues like these?
And can he mix them with that matchless skill,
And lay them on so delicately fine,
And lose them in each other, as appears
In every bud that blows? *Thomson's Spring*.

every one of the varying tints disposed! Here they seem to be thrown on with an easy dash of security and freedom, there they are adjusted by the nicest touches of art and accuracy; those which form the ground are always so judiciously chosen, as to heighten the lustre of the superadded figures, while the verdure of the impalement, or the shadings of the foliage, impart new liveliness to the whole: indeed, whether they are blended or arranged, softened or contrasted, they are manifestly under the conduct of a taste that never mistakes, a felicity that never falls short of the very perfection of elegance. Fine, inimitably fine, is the texture of the web on which these shining treasures are displayed. What are the labours of the Persian looms, or the boasted commodities of Brussels, compared with these curious manufactures of nature? compared with these, the most admired chintzes lose their reputation, even superfine cambrics appear coarse as canvas in their presence.

What a cheering argument does our Saviour derive from hence, to strengthen our affiance in God! He directs us to learn a lesson of heaven-depending faith from every bird that wings the air, and from every flower that blossoms in the field. If Providence, with unremitted care, supports those inferior creatures, and arrays these insensible beings with so much spleudour, surely He will in no wise withhold from his elect children 'bread to eat, and raiment to put on.' Ye faithful followers of the Lamb, dismiss every low anxiety relating to the needful sustenance of life. He that feeds the ravens, from an inexhaustible magazine: He that paints the plants with such surpassing elegance: in short, He that provides so liberally both for the animal and vegetable parts of

his creation, will not, cannot neglect his own people. Fear not, little flock, ye peculiar objects of Almighty love! it is your Father's good pleasure to give you a kingdom.* And, if he freely gives you an everlasting kingdom hereafter, is it possible to suppose that He will deny you any necessary conveniences here?

One cannot forbear reflecting in this place, on the too prevailing humour of being fond and ostentatious of dress. What an abject and mistaken ambition is this! How unworthy the dignity of immortal, and the wisdom of rational beings! Especially, since these little productions of the earth have indisputably the pre-eminence in such outward embellishments. Go, clothe thyself with purple and fine linen, trick thyself up in all the gay attire which the shuttle or the needle can furnish; yet know, to the mortification of thy vanity, that the native elegance of a common daisy eclipses all this elaborate finery. Nay, wert thou decked like some illustrious princess on her coronation-day, in all the splendour of royal apparel; couldst thou equal even Solomon in the height of his magnificence and glory, yet would the meanest among the flowery populace outshine thee; every discerning eye would give the preference to these beauties of the ground.† Scorn then to borrow thy recommendations from a neat disposition of threads, and a curious arrangement of colours: assume a becoming greatness of temper: let thy endowments be of the immortal kind: study to be all glorious within: be clothed with humility: wear the

* Luke xii. 32.

† Mr. Cowley, with his usual brilliancy of imagination, styles them stars of earth.

ornament of a meek and quiet spirit:* to say all in a word, put on the Lord Jesus Christ;† let his blood be sprinkled upon thy conscience, and it shall be whiter than the virgin snows: let his righteousness, like a spotless robe, adorn thy inner man; and thou shalt be amiable, even in the most distinguished eye of God. Let his blessed Spirit dwell in thy heart; and, under his sanctifying operations, thou shalt be made partakers of a Divine Nature.

These are real excellencies; truly noble accomplishments these. In this manner be arrayed, be beautified; and thou wilt not find a rival in the feathers of a peacock, or the foliation of a tulip. These will exalt thee far above the low pretensions of lace and embroidery. These will prepare thee to stand in the beatified presence, and to take thy seat among the angels of light.

What an enchanting situation is this! One can scarce be melancholy within the atmosphere of flowers. Such lively hues and delicious odours, not only address themselves agreeably to the senses, but touch, with a surprising delicacy, the sweetest movements of the mind.

——— To the heart inspiring
Vernal delight and joy.———*Milt.* b. iv.

How often have I felt them dissipate the gloom of thought, and transfuse a sudden gaiety through the

* How beautifully does the prophet describe the furniture of a renewed and heavenly mind under the similitude of a rich and complete suit of apparel! I will greatly rejoice in the Lord: my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation: he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.—Isa. lxi. 10.

† Rom. xiii. 14.

dejected spirit! I cannnot wonder that kings descend from their thrones to walk amidst blooming ivory and gold, or retire from the most sumptuous feast, to be recreated with the more refined sweets of the garden. I cannot wonder that queens forego for a while the compliments of a nation, to receive the tribute of the parterre; or withdraw from all the glitter of a court, to be attended with the more splendid equipage of a bed of flowers. But, if this be so pleasing, what transporting pleasure must arise from the fruition of uncreated Excellency! O, what unknown delight to enter into thy immediate presence, most blessed Lord God! to see thee,* thou King of Heaven, and Lord of Glory, no longer 'through a glass darkly, but face to face!' to have all thy goodness, all thy greatness, shine before us; and be made glad for ever with the brightest discovery of thy perfections, with the ineffable joy of thy countenance!

This we cannot bear, in our present imperfect state. The effulgence of unveiled Divinity would dazzle a mortal sight. Our feeble faculties would be overwhelmed with such a fulness of superabundant bliss, and must lie oppressed under such an exceeding great, eternal weight of glory. But when this corruptible hath put on incorruption, the powers of the soul will be greatly invigorated; and these earthly tabernacles will be transformed into the likeness of

* Isaiah represents the felicity of the righteous, in the everlasting world, by this elegant and amiable image; 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty.' Milton touches the same subject, with wonderful elevation and majesty of thought:

——— They walk with God,
High in salvation, and the climes of bliss:

words, which like the fiery car, almost transports our affections to those glorious abodes. Isai. xxxiii. 17. Milt. b. xi. 707.

Christ's glorious body. Then, 'though the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed,'* when the Lord of Hosts is revealed from heaven, yet shall his faithful people be enabled to see Him as He is.†

Here then, my wishes, here be fixed. Be this your determined and invariable aim. Here, my affections, here give a loose to your whole ardour. Cry out in the language of inspiration: 'This one thing have I desired of the Lord, which, with incessant earnestness I will require,—that I may dwell in the celestial house of the Lord all the days of my future life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord,‡ and to contemplate with wonder and adoration, with unspeakable and everlasting rapture, all the attributes of the incomprehensible Godhead.'

Solomon, a most penetrating judge of human nature knowing how highly mankind is charmed with the fine qualities of flowers, has figured out the blessed Jesus, that 'fairest among ten thousand,' by these lovely representatives. He styles him 'The rose of Sharon,'§ and 'The lily of the valleys;'‖ like the first, full of delights and communicable graces; like the last, exalted in majesty, and complete in beauty. In that sacred pastoral, he ranges the creation, borrows its most finished forms, and dips his pencil in its

* Isai. xxiv. 23. † 1 John iii. 2. ‡ Psal. xxvii. 4. § Cant. ii. 1.

‖ By the lily of the valleys, I apprehend, is meant, not the flower which commonly passes under that denomination, and is comparatively mean; but the grand majestic garden lily, growing in a rich irriguous soil, where it flourishes in the most ample manner, and arrives at the highest perfection. The circumstance of the valleys, added by the sacred writer, is significant not of the species, but of the place. This is by far the noblest interpretation, and most exactly suitable to the spiritual sense, which intimates, that the blessed Jesus delights to dwell, by the communications of his Spirit, in humble hearts.

choicest dyes, to present us with a sketch of the amiableness of his person. His amiableness, who is the light of the world, the glory of his church, the only hope, the sovereign consolation of sinners, and exalted, infinitely exalted, not only above the sublimest comparison, but even 'above all blessing and praise.' May I also make the same heavenly use of all sublunary enjoyments! Whatever is pleasurable or charming below, let it raise my desire to those delectable objects which are above; which will yield, not partial, but perfect felicity; not transient, but never-ending satisfaction and joy. Yes, my soul, let these beauties in miniature always remind thee of that glorious person, in whom 'dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, bodily.' Let these little emanations teach thee to thirst after the eternal fountain. O! may the creatures be thy constant clue to the Creator! For this is a certain truth, and deserves thy frequent recollection, demands thy most attentive consideration,—that the whole compass of finite perfection is only a faint ray,* shot from that immense source—is only a small drop, derived from that inexhaustible ocean—of all good.

What a surprising variety is observable among the flowery tribes! How has the bountiful hand of Providence diversified these nicest pieces of his workmanship; added the charms of an endless novelty to all the other perfections! A constant uniformity would soon render the entertainment tiresome or insipid; therefore every species is formed on a sepa-

* ——— Thou sitt'st above all heav'ns
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these thy lowest works: yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and pow'r divine.
Milt. book v.

rate plan, and exhibits something entirely new. The fashion spreads not from family to family; but every one has a mode of its own, which is truly original. The most cursory glance perceives an apparent difference, as well as a peculiar delicacy, in the airs and habits, the attitude and lineaments, of every distinct class.

Some rear their heads with a majestic mien, and overlook, like sovereigns or nobles, the whole parterre. Others seem more moderate in their aims, and advance only to the middle stations; a genius turned for heraldry might term them the gentry of the border. While others, free from all aspiring views creep unambitiously on the ground, and look like the commonalty of the kind. Some are intersected with elegant stripes, or studded with radiant spots. Some affect to be genteelly powdered, or neatly fringed: while others are plain in their aspect, unaffected in their dress, and content to please with a naked simplicity. Some assume the monarch's purple; some look most becoming in the virgin's white; but black, doleful black, has no admittance into the wardrobe of Spring. The weeds of mourning would be a manifest indecorum, when Nature holds an universal festival. She would, now, inspire none but delightful ideas; and therefore always makes her appearance in some amiable suit. Here stands a warrior, clad with crimson; there sits a magistrate, robed in scarlet; and yonder struts a pretty fellow, that seems to have dipped his plumes in the rainbow, and glitters in all the gay colours of that resplendent arch. Some rise into a curious cup, or fall into a set of beautiful bells. Some spread themselves in a swelling tuft, or crowd into a delicious cluster. In some, the predominant

stain softens by the gentlest diminutions, till it has even stole away from itself. The eye is amused at the agreeable delusion; and we wonder to find ourselves insensibly decoyed into a quite different lustre. In others, you would think the fine tinges were emulous of pre-eminence. Disdaining to mingle, they confront one another with the resolution of rivals, determined to dispute the prize of beauty; while each is improved by the opposition into the highest vivacity of complexion.

How manifold are thy works,* O Lord! multiplied even to a prodigy. Yet in wisdom, consummate wisdom, hast thou made them all. How I admire the vastness of the contrivance, and the exactness of the execution! Man, feeble man, with difficulty accomplishes a single work. Hardly, and after many efforts, does he arrive at a tolerable imitation of some one production of nature. But the Almighty artist spoke millions of substances into instantaneous being, the whole collection wonderfully various, and each individual completely perfect. Repeated experiments generally, I might say, always, discover errors or defects in our happiest inventions. Nay, what wins our approbation at the present hour or in this particular place, is very probably, in some remote period or some distant clime, treated with contempt. Whereas, these fine structures have pleased every taste, in every country, for almost six thousand years. Nor has any fault been detected in the original plan, not any room left for the least improvement from the first model.† All our performances, the more mi-

* Psalm civ. 24.

† Eccles. iii. 14. I know that whatsoever God doth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it.

nutely they are scanned, the more imperfect they appear with regard to these delicate objects, the more we search into their properties, the more we are ravished with their graces. They are sure to disclose fresh strokes of the most masterly skill, in proportion to the attention with which they are examined.

Nor is the simplicity of the operation less astonishing than the accuracy of the workmanship or the infinitude of the effects. Should you ask, 'Where and what are the materials which beautify the blooming world? what rich tints, what splendid dyes, what stores of shining crayons, stand by the Heavenly Limner when he paints the robe of nature?' 'Tis answered, His powerful pencil needs no such costly apparatus. A single principle, under his conducting hand, branches out into an immensity of the most varied and most finished forms. The moisture of the earth and of the circumambient air, passed through proper strainers and disposed in a range of pellucid tubes; this performs all the wonders, and produces all the beauties of vegetation. This creeps along the fibres of the low-spread moss, and climbs to the very tops of the lofty-waving cedars. This, attracted by the root, and circulating through invisible canals; this bursts into gems, expands itself into leaves, and clothes the forest with all its verdant honours. This one plain and simple cause gives birth to all the charms which deck the youth and maturity of the year. This blushes in the early hepatica, and flames in the late advancing poppy. This reddens into blood in the veins of the mulberry, and attenuates itself into leafen gold, to create a covering for the quince. This breathes in all the fragrant gales of our garden, and weeps odorous gum in the groves of Arabia. So

wonderful is our Creator in counsel, and so excellent in working !*

In a grove of tulips, or a knot of pinks, one perceives a difference in almost every individual. Scarce any two are turned and tinctured exactly alike. Each allows himself a little particularity in his dress, though all belong to one family: so that they are various, and yet the same. A pretty emblem this, of the smaller differences between Protestant Christians. There are modes in religion which admit of variation, without prejudice to sound faith or real holiness; just as the drapery on these pictures of the spring may be formed after a variety of patterns, without blemishing their beauty or altering their nature. Be it so then, that in some points of inconsiderable consequence several of our brethren dissent; yet let us all live amicably and sociably together, for we harmonize in principles, though we vary in punctilios. Let us join in conversation, and intermingle interests; discover no estrangement of behaviour, and cherish no alienation of affection. If any strife subsists, let it be to follow our divine Master most closely in humility of heart and unblameableness of life: let it be to serve one another most readily in all the kind offices of a cordial friendship. Thus shall we be united, though distinguished; united in the same grand fundamentals, though distinguished by some small circumstantials; united in one important bond of brotherly love, though distinguished by some slighter peculiarities of sentiment.

Between Christans, whose judgments disagree only about a form of prayer or manner of worship, I apprehend there is no more essential difference than

* Isa. xxviii. 29.

between flowers which bloom from the same kind of seed, but happen to be somewhat diversified in the mixture of their colours. Whereas if one denies the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and degrades the incarnate God to the meanness of a mere creature; if another cries up the worthiness of human works, and depreciates the alone-meritorious righteousness of the glorious Mediator; if a third addresses the incommunicable honours to a finite being, and bows to the image, or prays to the saint—these are errors extremely derogatory to the Redeemer's dignity, and not a little prejudicial to the comfort of his people: against these to remonstrate, against these to urge every argument and use every dissuasive, bespeaks not the censorious bigot, but the friend of truth, and the lover of mankind. Whereas to stand neuter and silent while such principles are propagated, would be an instance of criminal remissness rather than of Christian moderation. For the persons, we will not fail to maintain a tender compassion; we will not cease to put up earnest intercessions; we will also acknowledge and love whatever is excellent and amiable in their character; yet we dare not subscribe their creed: we cannot remit our assiduous but kind endeavours, if by any means we may reconcile them to a more scriptural belief and a purer worship.*

* In some former editions, I expressed myself on this point unwarily and harshly. But my meaning and real sentiments were no other than those represented above. The reader, from such unguarded intimations, might too naturally be led to conclude, that the author avows, and would stir up, a spirit of persecution. But this is a method of dealing with opponents in religious doctrines, which he disclaims as absurd, and abhors as iniquitous. He is for no force, but that of rational conviction; for no constraint, but that of affectionate persuasion. Thus, if you please, compel them to come in. Luke xiv. 23.

Another circumstance recommending and endearing the flowery creation, is their regular succession. They make not their appearance all at once, but in an orderly rotation. While a proper number of these obliging retainers are in waiting, the others abscond; but hold themselves in a posture of service, ready to take their turn, and fill each his respective station the instant it becomes vacant.—The snowdrop, foremost of the lovely train, breaks her way through the frozen soil, in order to present her early compliments to her Lord: dressed in the robe of innocency, she steps forth, fearless of danger, long before the trees have ventured to unfold their leaves, even while the icicles are pendant on our houses.—Next peeps out the crocus, but cautiously, and with an air of timidity. She hears the howling blasts, and skulks close to her low situation. Afraid she seems to make large excursions from her root, while so many ruffian winds are abroad, and scouring along the ether. Nor is the violet last in this shining embassy of the year; which with all the embellishments that would grace a royal garden, condescends to line our hedges, and grow at the feet of briars. Freely, and without any solicitation, she distributes the bounty of her emissive sweets; while herself, with an exemplary humility, retires from sight, seeking rather to administer pleasure than to win admiration.—Emblem, expressive emblem, of those modest virtues, which delight to bloom in obscurity, which extend a cheering influence to multitudes who are scarce acquainted with the source of their comforts! Motive, engaging motive, to that ever active beneficence, which stays not for the importunity of the distressed, but anticipates their suit and prevents them with the blessings of its goodness!

—The poor polyanthus, that lately adorned the border with her sparkling beauties, and, transplanted into our windows, gave us a fresh entertainment, is now no more. I saw her complexion fade, I perceived her breath decay, till at length she expired, and dropped into her grave.—Scarce have we sustained this loss, but in comes the auricula, and more than retrieves it. Arrayed she comes, in a splendid variety of amiable forms; with an eye of crystal, and garments of the most glossy stain; exhaling perfume, and powdered with silver. A very distinguished procession this! the favorite care of the florist! Scarce one among them but is dignified with a character of renown, or has the honour to represent some celebrated toast. But these also, notwithstanding their illustrious titles, have exhausted their whole stock of fragrance, and are mingled with the meanest dust.—Who could forbear grieving at their departure, did not the tulips begin to raise themselves on their fine wands or stately stalks? They flush the parterre with one of the gayest dresses that blooming nature wears. Did ever beau or belle make so gaudy an appearance in a birth-night suit? Here one may behold the innocent wantonness of beauty. Here she indulges a thousand freaks, and sports herself in the most charming diversity of colours. Yet I should wrong her, were I to call her a coquette, because she plays her lovely changes, not to enkindle dissolute affections, but to display her Creator's glory.—Soon arises the anemone, encircled at the bottom with a spreading robe, and rounded at the top into a beautiful dome. In its loosely-flowing mantle, you may observe a noble negligence; in its gently-bending tufts, the nicest symmetry. I would term it the fine gentleman of the

garden, because it seems to have learnt the singular address of uniting simplicity with refinement, of reconciling art and ease.—The same month has the merit of producing the ranunculus. All bold and graceful, it expands the riches of its foliage, and acquires by degrees the loveliest enamel in the world. As persons of intrinsic worth disdain the superficial arts of recommendation practised by fops, so this lordly flower scorns to borrow any of its excellence from powders and essences. It needs no such attractives to render it the darling of the curious, being sufficiently engaging from the elegance of its figure, the radiant variety of its tinges, and a certain superior dignity of aspect.—Methinks nature improves her operations. Her latest strokes are most masterly. To crown the collection, she introduces the carnation, which captivates every eye with a noble spread of graces, and charms another sense with a profusion of exquisite odours. This single flower has centered in itself the perfection of all the preceding. The moment it appears, it so commands our attention, that we scarce regret the absence of the rest.—The gilly-flower, like a real friend, attends you through all the vicissitudes and alterations of the season; while others make a transient visit only, this is rather an inhabitant than a guest in your gardens; adds fidelity to complaisance.

It is in vain to attempt a catalogue of these amiable gifts. There is an endless multiplicity in their characters, yet an invariable order in their approaches. Every month, almost every week, has its peculiar ornaments; not servilely copying the works of its predecessor, but forming, still forming, and still ex-

ecuting some new design. So lavish is the fancy, yet so exact is the process, of nature.

Here let me stand awhile to contemplate the distribution of flowers through the several periods of the year. Were they all to blossom together, there would be at once a promiscuous throng, and at once a total privation. We should scarce have an opportunity of adverting to the dainty qualities of half, and must soon lose the agreeable company of them all. But now, since every species has a separate post to occupy, and a distinct interval for appearing, we can take a leisurely and minute survey of each succeeding set. We can view and review their forms, enter into a more intimate acquaintance with their charming accomplishments, and receive all those pleasing services which they are commissioned to yield. This remarkable piece of economy is productive of another very valuable effect: it not only places in the most advantageous light, every particular community, but it is also a sure provisionary resource against the frailty of the whole nation; or, to speak more truly, it renders the flowery tribes a sort of immortal corps.* For though some are continually dropping, yet by this expedient others are as continually rising, to beautify our borders, and prolong the entertainment.

What goodness is this, to provide such a series of gratifications for mankind! both to diversify, and perpetuate, the fine collation! to take care that our paths should be in a manner incessantly strewed with

* In allusion to the celebrated practice of the Persian kings, who maintained for their life-guard, a body of troops, called immortal, because it perpetually subsisted: for as soon as any of the men died, another was immediately put into his place.—*Rollin's Ancient History*, vol. ii.

flowers! And what wisdom, to bid every one of these insensible beings know the precise juncture for their coming forth! Insomuch that no actor on a stage can be more exact in performing his part, can make a more regular entry, or a more punctual exit.

Who emboldens the daffodil to venture abroad in February, and to trust her flowering gold with inclement and treacherous skies? Who informs the various tribes of fruit-bearing blossoms, that vernal suns and a more genial warmth are fittest for their delicate texture? Who teaches the clove to stay till hotter beams are prepared, to infuse a spicy richness into her odours, and tincture her complexion with the deepest crimson? Who disposes these beautiful troops into such orderly bodies; retarding some, and accelerating others? Who has instructed them to file off with such perfect regularity, as soon as the duty of their respective station is over? And, when one detachment retires, who gives the signal for another immediately to advance? Who, but that unerring Providence, which, from the highest thrones of angels, to the very lowest degrees of existence, orders all things in 'number, weight, and measures?'

These, O my soul, are the regulations of that most adorable, that most beneficent Being, who bowed the heavens, came down to dwell on earth, and united the frailty of thy mortal nature to all the glories of his Godhead. All the honour of this admirable establishment belongs to thy Ransom, thy Surety, thy Saviour. To Him it belongs, who sustained the vengeance which thou hadst deserved and wast doomed to suffer; who fulfilled the obedience which thou wast obliged, but unable, to perform; and who humbled himself (stupendous, ineffable loving-kind-

ness!) humbled himself to death, even the death of the cross. He formed this vast machine, and adjusted its nice dependencies. The pillars that support it, the embellishments that adorn it, and the laws that govern it, are the result of his unsearchable counsels. O! the heights of his majesty, and the depths of his abasement!

Which shall we admire most, his essential greatness, or his free grace? He created the exalted seraph that sings in glory; and every the minutest insect that flutters in air or crawls in dust. He marks out a path for all those globes of light which travel the circuit of the skies, and disdains not to rear the violet from its lowly bed, or to plait the daisy which dresses our plains. So grand are his operations, yet so condescending his regards! If summer, like a sparkling bride, is brilliant and glorious in her apparel, what is this but a feeble reflection of his uncreated effulgence? If autumn, like a munificent host, opens her stores, and gives us all things richly to enjoy, what is this but a little taste of his inexhaustible liberality? If thunders roar, you hear the sound of his trumpet: if lightnings glare, you see the launching of his glittering spear: 'if the perpetual hills be scattered, and the everlasting mountains bowed,' you behold a display—no, says the prophet, you have rather the hiding of his power.* So immense is his

* Hab. iii. 4. Nothing can be more magnificently conceived than the imagery of this whole chapter; and upon the foot of our interpretation, nothing was ever more delicately and nobly turned than the sentiment of this clause. Other senses of the passage, I acknowledge, may be assigned with equal propriety: but none, I think, can be imagined so majestic and sublime. As the original will fairly admit of it, as it carries no disagreement with the context, and expresses a most important, as well as undoubted truth, I hope, I may

power, so uncontrollable and inconceivable, that all these mighty works are but a sketch in which more is concealed than discovered.

Thus, I think, we should always view the visible system, with an evangelical telescope (if I may be allowed the expression), and with an evangelical microscope, regarding Christ Jesus as the great projector and architect who planned and executed the amazing scheme. Whatever is magnificent or valuable, tremendous or amiable, should ever be ascribed to the Redeemer. This is the Christian's natural philosophy. With regard to this method of considering the things that are seen, we have an inspired apostle for our preceptor and precedent. Speaking of Christ, he says, 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands.' Did we carefully attend to this leading

be permitted to use it, at least by way of accommodation; especially as it suggests one of the finest mottos imaginable, wherewith to inscribe all the visible productions of the Creator's hand. When, struck with astonishment, we consider their grandeur, beauty, and consummate perfections, let us, in justice to their Author, apply the exalted reflection of this sacred ode: 'In all these is the hiding rather than an adequate display of his matchless power. Though they challenge our praise, and surpass our comprehension, yet they are by no means the utmost exertions, but rather some slighter essays, of omnipotent skill.' Milton, relating the overthrow of the fallen angels, introduces a grand circumstance, not much unlike the preceding. Messiah, unaided, and alone, had routed an innumerable host of apostate spirits. This was great and marvellous. But to create a juster idea of the illustrious conqueror, our poet beautifully adds—

'Yet half his strength he put not forth.'

If we forget to make the same remark, when we contemplate God in his works we must necessarily form very scanty conceptions of that Supreme Being, before whom all nations are as a 'drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.'

principle in all our examinations of nature, it would doubtless be a most powerful means of enkindling our love, and strengthening our faith.* When I look round upon millions of noble substances, and carry with me this transporting reflection, 'The Maker of them all expired on a cross for me; how can I remain any longer indifferent? Must not the coldest heart begin to glow with gratitude?' When I survey an immensity of the finest productions imaginable, and remember that the Author of them all is my right-

* The apostles, I observe, delight to use this method of displaying the honours of the Redeemer, and establishing the faith of his people. The beloved disciple, teaching that most precious doctrine, 'of a Lamb slain to take away the sins of the world,' in order to evince the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for this blessed purpose, affirms, that all things were made by him: and without him was not any thing, no, not so much as one single being, made, John i. 3.—St. Paul, preaching the same glad tidings to the Colossians, and expressly maintaining, that we have redemption through his blood, seems to foresee an objection of this kind: 'To expiate transgressions against an infinite majesty is a most prodigious act. It must cost vastly more than any common surety can pay, to redeem a sinful world. What reason have we to believe, that Jesus is equal to this mighty undertaking!' All possible reason, replies the apostle, from the dignity of his person, for he is the image of the invisible God; and from the greatness of his works, for by him all things were made. Consider the operations of his hands, and you cannot doubt the atoning efficacy of his death. Col. i. 15, 16.—The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews falls exactly into the same train of arguing. Declaring that Christ Jesus has purged our sins by the sacrifice of himself, he proves his ample ability for this tremendous office from his essential excellence, because he is the brightness of his Father's glory; and from his amiable works, because he made the worlds, and upholdeth all things by the word of his power, Heb. i. 2, 3, which truth, as it is so important in itself, of such signal comfort to Christians, and so particularly insisted on by the inspired writers, I hope I shall need no apology for an attempt to illustrate and enforce it in a kind of evangelical descant upon Creation annexed to these Reflections.

teousness and my redemption;' how can I choose but repose the most cheerful confidence in such a Mediator?

Let me add one more remark upon the admirable adjustment of every particular relating to these fine colonies planted in the parterre. With such accuracy and correctness is their structure finished, that any the least conceivable alteration would very much impair their perfection. Should you see, for instance, the nice disposition of the tulip's attire fly abroad, disorderly and irregular, like the flaunting woodbine; should the jessamine rear her diminutive head on those grand columns which support the hollyhock; should the erect and manly aspect of the piony hang down with a pensive air, like the flexile bells of the hyacinth; should that noble plainness which distinguishes the lily be exchanged for the glittering fringes which edge the pink, or the gaudy stains which bedrop the iris; should those tapering pillars which arise in the middle of its vase, and, tipt with golden pendants, give such a lustre to the surrounding pannels of alabaster—should those sink and disappear, like the chives which cover the heart of the anemone; in many of these cases, would not the transposition be fantastical and awkward? in all, to the apparent prejudice of every individual?

Again, with regard to the time of their appearing, this circumstance is settled by a remarkable foresight and precaution. What would become of the sailor, if in very stormy weather he should raise a lofty mast, and crowd it with all his canvas! Such would be the ill effect, if the most stately species of flowers should presume to come abroad in the blustering months. Ah! how would they rue the imprudent

boldness! Therefore those only that shoot the shortest stems, and display the smallest spread of leaves, or (if you please) carry the least sail, are launched amidst the blowing seasons. How injudiciously would the perfumer act, if he should unseal his finest essences, and expose them to the northern winds or wintry rains! Our blooming artists of the aromatic profession, at least the most delicate among them, seem perfectly aware of the consequences of such a procedure. Accordingly they postpone the opening of their odoriferous treasures till a serener air, and more unclouded skies, grant a protection to their amiable traffic; till they are under no more apprehensions of having their spicy cells rifled by rude blasts, or drowned in incessant showers.

What a striking argument is here for resignation, unfeigned resignation, to all the disposals of Providence! Too often are our dissatisfied thoughts apt to find fault with divine dispensations. We tacitly arraign our Maker's conduct, or question his kindness with regard to ourselves. We fancy our lot not so commodiously situated, or our condition not so happily circumstanced, as if we had been placed in some other station of life. But let us behold this exquisitely nice regulation of the minutest plants, and be ashamed of our repining folly. Could any fibre in their composition be altered, or one line in their features be transposed, without clouding some of their beauties? Could any fold in their vestments be varied, or any link in their orderly succession be broken, without injuring some delicate property? And does not that All-seeing Eye, which preserves so exact a harmony among these pretty toys, maintain as watchful a care over his rational creatures? Does

he choose the properest season for the cowslip to arise, and drink the dews, and can he neglect the concerns, or misjudge the conveniences, of his sone and daughters? He, who has so completely disposed whatever pertains to the vegetable economy, that the least diminution or addition would certainly hurt the finished scheme, does, without all peradventure, preside with equal attention over the interests of his own people.

Be still, then, thou uneasy mortal; know that God is unerringly wise; and be assured that, amidst the greatest multiplicity of beings, he does not overlook thee. Thy Saviour has given me authority to assert, that thou art of far superior value, in the estimate of Omnipotence, than all the herbage of the field. If his sacred will ordains sickness for thy portion, never dare to imagine that uninterrupted health would be more advantageous. If he pleases to withhold or take away children, never presume to conclude, that thy happiness is blasted, because thy hopes of an increasing family are disappointed. He that marshals all the starry host, and so accurately arranges every the meanest species of herbs, he orders all the peculiarities, all the changes of thy state, with a vigilance that nothing can elude, with a goodness that endureth for ever. Bow thy head, therefore, in humble acquiescence. Rest satisfied, that whatever is by the appointment of Heaven,* is right, is best.

* 'Whatever is, is right.'—If Mr. Pope understands the maxim according to the limitation suggested above, he speaks a most undeniable and glorious truth. But if that great poet includes whatever comes to pass, through the wild and extravagant passions of men, surely no thinking person, at least, no Christian, can accede to his opinion.—What God orders is wise beyond all possibility of correction; and good above all that we can ask or think. His decrees are the result of infi-

Among all the productions of the third creating-day, this of flowers seems to be peculiarly designed for man. Man has the monopoly of this favour; it is conferred on him by a sort of exclusive charter. See the imperial crown, splendid and beautifully grand! See the tuberose, delicate and languishingly fair! See all the pomp and glory of the parterre, where paint and perfume do wonders. Yet the inferior animals are neither smit with their beauties, nor regaled with their odours. The horse never stands still to gaze upon their charms, nor does the ox turn aside to browse upon their sweets. Senses they have to discern these curious objects in the gross, but no taste to distinguish or relish their fine accomplishments. Just so, carnal and unenlightened men may understand the literal meaning of Scripture, may comprehend the evidences of its divine inspiration; yet have no ardent longing for the spiritual blessings it offers, see 'no form or comeliness' in the Saviour it describes, so as to render him the supreme desire of their souls.

The chief end of these beautiful appearances, phi-

nite discernment, and his dispensations the issues of unbounded benevolence. But man, fallen man, is hurried away by his lusts into a thousand irregularities, which are deplorably evil in themselves, and attended with consequences manifestly pernicious to society. Let the sentiment, therefore, be restrained to the disposals of Heaven, and I most readily subscribe it. But if it be extended to the conduct of men, and the effects of their folly, I think myself obliged to enter my protest against it. For whatever kindles the divine indignation—is cause of final ruin to the author, is strictly forbidden by God's holy word, is contrary to the whole design of his revealed will, and the very reverse of his essential attributes,—this cannot possibly be right, this is most undoubtedly wrong. Omnipotence, indeed, can over-rule it, and educe good from it. But the very notion of over-ruling supposes it to be absolutely wrong in itself.

losophers say, is to unfold and cherish the embryo seed, or to swathe the tender body during its infant state. But whatever is the chief end of nature, 'tis certain she never departs from the design of administering delight to mankind.* This is inseparably connected with other views. Were it only to secure a reproductive principle, what need of such elegant complications? Why so much art employed, and so many decorations added? Why should vestments be prepared richer than brocades, more delicate than lawns, and of a finer glow than the most admired velvets? If the great mother had no other aim than barely to accommodate her little offspring, warm flannel or homely fustian would have served her turn; served it full as well as the most sumptuous tissues, or all the furniture of the mercer's shop.

Evident then it is that flowers are endued with such enchanting graces for the pleasure of man. In pursuance of this original intention, they have always paid their court to the human race; they still seem particularly solicitous of recommending themselves to our regard. The finest of each species crowd about our habitations; and are rarely to be seen at a distance from our abodes. They thrive under our cultivating hand and observing eye, but degenerate and pine away if unregarded by their lord. To win his attention, and deck his retreats, they hide their deformities under ground, and display nothing but

* 'We find that the most important parts in the vegetable world are those which are the most beautiful. These are the seeds by which the several races of plants are propagated and continued, and which are always lodged in flowers or blossoms. Nature seems to hide her principal design, and to be industrious in making the earth gay and delightful, while she is carrying on her great work, and intent upon her own preservation.' *Spect.* vol. v. No. 387.

the most graceful forms and engaging colours to his sight. To merit a farther degree of his esteem, the generality of them dispense a delightful perfume. What is still more obliging, they reserve their richest exhalations to embalm his morning and evening walks.* Because he usually chooses those cool hours to recreate himself among their blooming ranks, therefore at those hours they are most lavish of their fragrance, and breathe out their choicest spirits.

O man, greatly beloved by thy Creator! the darling of Providence! thou art distinguished by his goodness; distinguish thyself also by thy gratitude. Be it thy one undivided aim to glorify Him who has been at so much expense to gratify thee!—While all these inferior creatures, in silent eloquence, declare the glory of God, do thou lend them thy tongue. Be thou the high-priest of the mute creation. Let their praises become vocal in thy songs. Adore the Supreme Benefactor for the blessings He showers down upon every order of beings. Adore him for numberless mercies which are appropriated to thyself. But, above all, adore Him for that noble gift of a rational and immortal soul: this constitutes us masters of the globe, and gives us the real enjoyment of its riches: this discovers ten thousand beauties, which otherwise had been lost, and renders them both a source of delight and a nursery of devotion. By virtue of this exalted principle, we are qualified to admire our Maker's works, and capable of bearing his illustrious image; bearing his illustrious image, not only when these ornaments of the ground have re-

* ——— The flow'rs,
That open now their choicest bosom'd smells,
Reserv'd from night, and kept for thee in store.—*Milt.*

signed their honours, but when the great origin of day is extinguished in the skies, and all the flaming orbs on high are put out in obscure darkness. Then to survive, to survive the ruins of one world, and to enjoy God—to resemble God—to be 'filled with all the fulness of God,' in another—what a happiness, what an inestimable happiness, is this! Yet this is thy privilege (barter it not, for trifles of an hour!) this thy glorious prerogative, O man!

O! the goodness, the exuberant goodness, of our God! I cannot forbear celebrating it once more, before I pass to another consideration.—How much should we think ourselves obliged to a generous friend, who should build a stately edifice* purely for

* I cannot persuade myself, that the comparison is stretched beyond proper bounds when carried to this pitch. It is my stedfast opinion, that the world, at least this lower world, with its various appurtenances, was intended purely for man; that it is appropriated to him; and that he (in subordination to God's glory) is the end of its creation. Other animals, 'tis true, partake of the Creator's benefits: but then they partake under the notion of man's domestics, or on the foot of retainers to him; as creatures, which bear some relation to his service, and some way or other contribute to his good. So that still he is the centre of the whole; or, as our incomparable Milton, equally master of poetry and divinity, expresses himself,

'All things live for man.'—*Par. Lost.* b. xi. 161.

Mr. Pope, in his Ethic Epistles, is pleased to explode this tenet as the height of pride and a gross absurdity. For my part I see no reason for such a charge. With all submission to so superior a genius, it seems very remote from pride to be duly sensible of favours vouchsafed; to contemplate them in all the extent of their munificence, and acknowledge them accordingly. I should rather imagine, that to contract their size, when they are immensely large; to stint their number, when they are altogether innumerable; that such a procedure savours more of insensibility than our hypothesis of presumption, and has more in it of ingratitude than that of arrogance.

And how can it be deemed an absurdity, to maintain that

our abode! But how greatly would the obligation be increased, if the hand that built should also furnish it! and not only furnish it with all that is commodious and comfortable, but ornament it also with whatever is splendid and delightful!—this has our

God gave us a world for our possession, when it is our duty to believe that he gave us his only Son for our propitiation! Sure, it can be neither difficult nor extravagant to suppose, that he designed the habitable globe, with its whole furniture, for our present use; since he withheld not his holy child Jesus, but freely delivered him up for our final salvation.

Upon the whole, I cannot but conclude, that the attempt of our famous poet is neither kind with regard to his fellow-creatures, nor grateful with regard to his Creator; neither is his scheme in fact true.—The attempt not kind with regard to man, because it robs him of one of the most delightful and ravishing contemplations imaginable. To consider the great Author of existence as having me in his eye, when he formed universal nature; as contriving all things with an immediate view to the exigencies of my particular state; and making them all in such a manner, as might be most conducive to my particular advantage; this must occasion the strongest satisfactions, whenever I cast a glance on the objects that surround me.—Not grateful with regard to God, because it has the most direct tendency to diminish our sense of his kindness, and by that means to throw a damp upon our gratitude. It teaches us to look upon ourselves, as almost lost among a crowd of other beings, or regarded only with an occasional and incidental beneficence, which must certainly weaken the disposition and indeed slacken the ties to the most adoring thankfulness.—To which, I apprehend, we may justly add, neither is the scheme in fact true. For, not to mention what might be urged from the sure word of revelation, this one argument appears sufficiently conclusive. The world began with man; the world must cease with him; consequently, the grand use, the principal end of the world, is to subserve the interest of man. It is on all sides agreed, that the edifice was erected when man was to be furnished with an habitation: and that it will be demolished, when man has no farther need of its accommodations. When he enters into the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, 'the earth, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.' From which it seems a very obvious and fair deduction, that man is the final cause of this inferior creation.

So that I think my readers and myself privileged (not to

most indulgent Creator done, in a manner infinitely surpassing all we could wish or imagine.

The earth is assigned us for a dwelling. The skies are stretched over us like a magnificent canopy dyed in the purest azure; and beautified, now with pictures of floating silver, now with colourings of reflected crimson. The grass is spread under us as a spacious carpet, wove with silken threads of green, and damasked with flowers of every hue. The sun, like a golden lamp, is hung out in the ethereal vault; and pours his effulgence all the day to lighten our paths. When night approaches, the moon takes up the friendly office; and the stars are kindled in twinkling myriads to cheer the darkness with their milder lustre, not disturb our repose by too intense a glare. The clouds, besides the rich paintings they hang around the heavens, act the part of a shifting screen; and defend us, by their seasonable interposition, from the scorching beams of summer. May we not also regard them as the great watering-pots of the globe? which, wafted on the wings of the wind, dispense their moisture* evenly through the univer-

say, on the principles of gratitude, obliged) to use those lovely lines of our author, with a propriety and truth, equal to their elegance and beauty:—

> For me kind Nature wakes her genial pow'r,
> Suckles each herb, and spreads out ev'ry flow'r!
> Annual, for me, the grape, the rose renew
> The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew;
> For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings;
> For me, health gushes from a thousand springs.
>
> *Eth. Ep.* i. ver. 129.

* This circumstance, amidst abundance of other delicate and edifying remarks upon the wonders of nature, is finely touched in the Philosophical Transactions recorded in the book of Job, chap. xxxviii. ver. 15.—Who hath divided a water-course for the overflowing of waters?—The Hebrew is so pregnant and rich with sense, that no translation can do

sal garden; and fructify, with their showers, whatever our hand plants. The fields are our exhaustless granary. The ocean is our vast reservoir. The animals spend their strength to dispatch our business, resign their clothing to replenish our wardrobe, and surrender their very lives to provide for our tables. In short, every element is a storehouse of conveniences, every season brings us the choicest productions, all nature is our caterer: and, which is a most endearing recommendation of these favours, they are all as lovely as they are useful. You observe nothing mean or inelegant. All is clad in beauty's fairest robe, and regulated by proportion's nicest rule. The whole scene exhibits a fund of pleasures to the imagination, at the same time that it more than supplies all our wants.*

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, that rebellest against thy Maker. He sur-

it justice. The following paraphrase, perhaps, may represent the principal ideas comprehended in the expressive original: —Who has branched out, and with admirable judgment disposed a variety of aqueducts, for that immense collection of waters which float in the sky?—Who distributes these pendulous floods through all the borders of the earth? Distributes them, not in dreadful cataracts, or promiscuous gluts of rain, but in kindly drops and refreshing showers, with as much regularity and economy as if they were conveyed by pipes from a conduit? To whom shall we ascribe that niceness of contrivance, which now emits, now restrains them; sometimes drives their humid train to one place, sometimes to another: dispenses them to this soil in larger, to that in smaller communications; and, in a word, so manages the mighty fluid, that every spot is supplied in exact proportion to its wants, none destroyed by an undistinguishing deluge!

* 'These several living creatures, which are made for our service or sustenance, at the same time either fill the woods with their music, furnish us with game, or raise pleasing ideas in us by the delightfulness of their appearance. Fountains, lakes, and rivers, are as refreshing to the imagination, as to the soil through which they pass.' *Spect.* vol. v. No. 387.

rounds thee with unnumbered benefits, and follows thee with an effusion of the richest, noblest gifts. He courts thy affections, he solicits thy gratitude, by liberalities which are never intermitted, by a bounty which knows no limits.—Most blessed Lord, let this thy goodness, thy unwearied goodness, lead us to repentance. Win us to thyself, thou Fountain of Felicity, by these sweet inducements. Draw us to our duty, thou God of our Salvation, by these 'cords of love.'

What a living picture is here of the beneficial effects of industry! By industry and cultivation, this neat spot is an image of Eden. Here is all that can entertain the eye, or regale the smell. Whereas, without cultivation, this sweet garden had been a desolate wilderness. Vile thistles had made it loathsome, and tangling briars inaccessible. Without cultivation it might have been a nest of serpents, and the horrid haunt of venomous creatures. But the spade and pruning-knife in the hands of industry have improved it into a sort of terrestrial paradise.

How naturally does this lead our contemplation to the advantages which flow from a virtuous education, and the miseries which ensue from the neglect of it! The mind, without early instruction, will, in all probability, become like the 'vineyard of the sluggard;' if left to the propensities of its own depraved will, what can we expect but the most luxuriant growth of unruly appetites, which in time will break forth into all manner of scandalous irregularities? What! —but that anger, like a prickly thorn, arm the temper with an untractable moroseness; peevishness, like a stinging nettle, render the conversation irksome and forbidding: avarice, like some choaking

weed, teach the fingers to gripe, and the hands to oppress: revenge, like some poisonous plant, replete with baneful juices, rankle in the breast, and meditate mischief to its neighbour: while unbridled lusts, like swarms of noisome insects, taint each rising thought; and render 'every imagination of the heart only evil continually?' Such are the usual products of savage nature; such the furniture of the uncultivated soul!

Whereas let the mind be put under the 'nurture and admonition of the Lord:' let holy discipline clear the soil: let sacred instructions sow it with the best seed: let skill and vigilance dress the rising shoots; direct the young ideas how to spread; the wayward passions how to move: then what a different state of the inner man will quickly take place. Charity will breathe her sweets, and hope expand her blossoms; the personal virtues display their graces, and the social ones their fruits;* the sentiments become generous, the carriage endearing, the life honourable and useful.

O! that governors of families and masters of schools would watch with a conscientious solicitude over the morals of their tender charge! What pity it is, that the advancing generation should lose these invaluable endowments through any supineness in their instructors! See! with what assiduity the curious

* This transformation of the heart and renewal of the life are represented in Scripture by similitudes very nearly allied to the images used above. God, by his sanctifying Spirit, will make the soul as a watered garden. Under the operation of this divine rinciple, the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. Wherever it exerts the refining and enobliug energy, instead of the thorn shall come up the fig-tree, and instead of the brier, the myrtle tree. Jerem. xxxi. 12. Isai. xxxv. 1. lv. 13.

florist attends his little nursery? He visits them early and late; furnishes them with the properest mould, supplies them with seasonable moisture; guards them from the ravages of insects; screens them from the injuries of the weather; marks their springing buds; observes them attentively through their whole progress; and never intermits his anxiety till he beholds them blown into full perfection. And shall a range of painted leaves, which flourish to-day, and to-morrow fall to the ground—shall these be tended with more zealous application, than the exalted faculties of an immortal soul?

Yet trust not in cultivation alone. It is the blessing of the Almighty Husbandman, which imparts success to such labours of love. If God 'seal up the bottles of heaven,' and command the clouds to withhold their fatness, the best-manured spot becomes a barren desert. And if he restrain the dew of his heavenly benediction, all human endeavours miscarry; the rational plantation languishes; our most pregnant hopes, from youths of the most promising genius, prove abortive. Their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom will go up as dust.* Therefore, let parents plant; let tutors water; but let both look up to the Father of spirits for the desired increase.

On every side, I espy several budding flowers. As yet, they are like bales of cloth from the packer's warehouse: each is wrapt within a strong enclosure, and its contents are tied together by the firmest bandages; so that all their beauties lie concealed, and all their sweets are locked up. Just such is the niggardly wretch, whose aims are all turned inward, and

* Isai. v. 24.

meanly terminated upon himself; who makes his own private interests or personal pleasures the sole centre of his designs, and the scanty circumference of his actions.

Ere long the searching beams will open these silken folds, and draw them into a graceful expansion. Then, what a lovely blush will glow in their cheeks, and what a balmy odour exhale from their bosoms! So, when divine grace shines upon the mind, even the churl becomes bountiful; the heart of stone is taken away, and a heart of flesh, a heart susceptible of the softest, most compassionate emotions, is introduced in its stead. O! how sweetly do the social affections dilate themselves under so benign an influence! just like these disclosing gems, under the powerful eye of day. The tender regards are no longer confined to a single object; but extend themselves into a generous concern for mankind, and shed liberal refreshments on all within their reach.*

Arise then, thou Sun of righteousness; arise with healing under thy wings; and transfuse thy gentle but penetrating ray through all our intellectual powers. Enlarge every narrow disposition, and fill us with a diffusive benevolence. Make room in our

* The prophet describing the charitable temper, very beautifully says, 'If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry.'—This, I think, may not improperly be illustrated by the circumstances observed above. The opening of those buds into a large and extensive spread, is a pretty portrait of the amplitude of a generous heart, which cannot shut up its compassion, or remain unconcerned at any human calamity. The freeness and copiousness with which the expanded flowers are continually pouring out their choicest essences, may represent the various acts of an unwearied liberality; together with those endearing words and that cordial affection which embalm, as it were, a gift, double its value, and constitute what the sacred penman styles, 'drawing out the soul,' Isai. lviii. 10.

breasts for the whole human race; and teach us to love all our fellow-creatures for their amiable Creator's sake. May we be pleased with their excellencies, and rejoice in their happiness; but feel their miseries as our own, and with a brother's sympathy hasten to relieve them!

Disposed at proper distances, I observe a range of strong and stately stalks. They stand like towers along the walls of a fortified city, or rise like lofty spires amidst the group of houses. They part, at the top, into several pensile spiky pods, from each of which we shall soon see a fine figure displaying itself rounded into a form, which constitutes a perfect circle, spread wide open into the most frank and communicative air; and tinged with the colour which is so peculiarly captivating to the miser's eye.

But the property I chiefly admire, is its passionate fondness for the sun. When the evening shades take place, the poor flower droops, and folds up its leaves. It mourns all the long night, and pines amidst the gloom, like some forlorn lover banished from the object of his affections. No sooner does Providence open 'the eyelids of the morning,' but it meets and welcomes the returning light, courts and caresses it all the day, nor ever loses sight of the refulgent charmer so long as he continues above the horizon! In the morning, you may perceive it presenting a golden bosom to the east; at noon, it points upward to the middle sky; in the evening follows the same attractive influence to the west.

Surely Nature is a book, and every page rich with sacred hints. To an attentive mind the garden turns preacher, and its blooming tenants are so many lively sermons. What an engaging pattern, and what an ex-

cellent lesson have we here!—So let the redeemed of the Lord look unto Jesus,* and be conformed to their Beloved. Let us all be heliotropes (if I may use the expression) to the Sun of righteousness; let our passions rise and fall, take this course or that, as his word determines, as his holy example guides; let us be so accommodated both to his commanding and providential will, as the wax is turned to the imprinted seal; or, as the aspect of this enamoured flower, to the splendid star which creates our day.

In every enjoyment, O thou watchful Christian, look unto Jesus; receive it as proceeding from his love, and purchased by his agonies.† In every tribulation look unto Jesus; mark his gracious hand, managing the scourge, or mingling the bitter cup; attempering it to a proper degree of severity; adjusting the time of its continuance; and ready to make these seeming disasters productive of real good. In every infirmity and failing, look unto Jesus, thy merciful high-priest; pleading his atoning blood, and making intercession for transgressors. In every prayer look unto Jesus, thy prevailing advocate; recommending thy devotions, and 'bearing the iniquity of thy holy things.'‡ In every temptation look unto Jesus, the author of thy strength, and captain of thy salvation; who alone is able to lift up the hands which hang down, to invigorate the enfeebled knees, and make thee more than conqueror over all thy

* Heb. xii. 2.

† He sunk beneath our heavy woes,
To raise us to his throne:
There's not a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan.—*Watts.*

‡ Exod. xxviii. 38

enemies. But especially, when the hour of thy departure approaches; when 'thy flesh and thy heart fail;' when all the springs of life are irreparably breaking; then look unto Jesus with a believing eye.* Like expiring Stephen, behold him standing at the right hand of God, on purpose to succour his people in this their last extremity. Yes, my Christian friend; when thy journey through life is finished, and thou art arrived on the very verge of mortality; when thou art just launching out into the invisible world, and all before thee is vast eternity; then, O then, be sure to look stedfastly unto Jesus! 'See by faith the Lord's Christ.' View him as the only way to the everlasting mansions,† as the only door to the abodes of bliss.‡

Yonder tree which faces the south, has something too remarkable, to pass without observation. Like the fruitful though feeble vine, she brings forth a large family of branches: but, unable to support them herself, commits them to the tuition of a sunny wall. As yet the tender twigs have scarce gemmed their future blossoms. However, I may anticipate the well-known productions, and picture to myself the passion-flower: which will, in due time, with a long and copious succession, adorn the boughs.

I have read, in a Latin author, of flowers inscribed with the name of kings; but here is one emblazoned with the marks of the bleeding Prince of life. I read in the inspired writings of apostolic men, who bore about in their bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus;§ but here is a blooming religioso, that carries apparent

* Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, Isai. xiv. 22.

† John xiv. 6. ‡ John x. 9. § 2 Cor. iv. 10.

memorials of the same tremendous and fatal catastrophe. Who would have expected to find such a tragedy of woe, exhibited in a collection of the most delicate delights? Or to see Calvary's horrid scene pourtrayed on the softest ornaments of the garden? Is nature then actuated by the noble ambition of paying commemorative honours to her agonizing Sovereign? Is she kindly officious to remind forgetful mortals of that miracle of mercy, which it is their duty to contemplate, and their happiness to believe? Or is a sportive imagination my interpreter, and all the supposed resemblance no more than the precarious gloss of fancy? Be it so; yet even fancy has her merit, when she sets forth in such pleasing imagery the crucified Jesus. Nor shall I refuse a willing regard to imagination herself, when she employs her creative powers to revive the sense of such unparalleled love, and prompt my gratitude to so divine a Friend.

That spiral tendril, arising from the bottom of the stalk, is it a representation of the scourge which lashed the Redeemer's unspotted flesh, and inflicted those stripes by which our souls are healed? Or is it twisted for the cord which bound his hands in painful and ignominious confinement—those beneficent hands, which were incessantly stretched out to unloose the heavy burdens, and to impart blessings of every choice kind? Behold the nails which were drenched in his sacred veins, and rivetted his feet to the accursed tree—those beautiful feet,* which always went about doing good, and travelled far

* How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation! Isai. lii. 7.

and near to spread the glad tidings of everlasting salvation. See the hammer, ponderous and massy, which drove the rugged irons through the shivering nerves, and forced a passage for those dreadful wedges between the dislocated bones. View the thorns which encircled our royal Master's brow, and shot their keen afflicted points into his blessed head. O the smart! the racking smart! when, instead of the triumphal laurel, or the odoriferous garland, that pungent and ragged wreath was planted on the meek Messiah's forehead! when violent and barbarous blows of the strong eastern cane* struck the prickly crown, and fixed every thorn deep in his throbbing temples!† There stand the disciples ranged in the green impalement, and forming a circle round the instruments of their great Commander's death. They appear like so many faithful adherents, who breathe a gallant resolution, either of defending their Lord to the last extremity, or of dropping honourably by his

* 'They took the reed,' says the sacred historian, 'and smote him on the head; and so, as it were, nailed down the thorns into his forehead and temples, and occasioned thereby exquisite pain, as well as a great effusion of blood.' Family Expositor, vol. ii. sect. 188. 'It is most probable,' adds the same judicious critic, 'this was a walking-staff which they put into his hand as a sceptre, for a blow with a slight reed would scarce have been felt, or have deserved a mention in a detail of such dreadful sufferings.'

† The smart attending this unparalleled piece of contempt and barbarity, must be inexpressibly severe; not only on account of the many painful punctures made in the flesh, but principally because the periosteum, an exquisitely sensible tegument of the bones, lying in those parts, very near the external skin, must receive a multitude of terrible wounds, the anguish of which could not fail of being inflamed to an excess of rage, by the continuance of so many thorny lancets in that extremely tender membrane; which, in such a case,

——— trembling alive all o'er,
Must smart and agonize at ev'ry pore.

side. But did they give such proofs of zeal and fidelity in their conduct, as their steady posture and determined aspect seemed to promise? Alas! what is all human firmness, when destitute of succours from above, but an expiring vapour? What is every saint, if unsupported by powerful grace, but an abandoned traitor? Observe the glory, delineated in double rays, grand with imperial purple, and rich with ethereal blue. But, ah! how incapable are threads, though spun by summer's finest hand, though dyed in snows, or dipped in heaven, to display the immaculate excellency of his human, or the ineffable majesty of his divine nature! Compared with these sublime perfections, the most vivid assemblage of colours fade into an unmeaning flatness; the most charming effects of light and shade are not only mere daubings, but an absolute blank.

Among all the beauties which shine in sunny robes, and sip the silver dews, this, I think, has the noblest import, if not the finest presence. Were they all to pass in review, and expect the award of superiority from my decision, I should not hesitate a moment. Be the prize assigned to this amiable candidate; which has so eminently distinguished and so highly dignified herself, by bearing such a remarkable resemblance to 'the righteous Branch; the Plant of renown.'* While others appoint it a place in the parterre, I would transplant the passion-flower, or rather transfer its sacred significancy, to my heart. There let it bloom, both in summer and in winter; bloom, in the most impressive characters, and with an undecaying lustre: that I may also wear—wear

* So the blessed Jesus is described, Jerem. xxiii. 5. Ezek. xxxiv. 29.

on my very soul, the traces of Immanuel; pierced for my sins, and bruised for my transgressions: that I also may be crucified with Christ,* at least in penitential remorse, and affectionate sympathy: that I may know the fellowship of his sufferings;† and feel all my evil affections wounded by his agonies, mortified by his death.

There is another subject of the verdant kingdom, which, on account of its very uncommon qualities, demands my particular notice: one, so extremely diffident in her disposition, and delicate in her constitution, that she dares not venture herself abroad in the open air, but is nursed up in the warmth of a hot-bed, and lives cloistered in the cells of a greenhouse. But, the most curious peculiarity is, that of all her kindred species, she alone partakes of perceptive life; at least, advances nearest to this more exalted state of being; and may be looked upon as the link which connects the animal and the vegetable world. A stranger, observing her motions, would almost be induced to suspect, that she is endued with some inferior degrees of consciousness and caution. For if you offer to handle this sensitive plant, she immediately takes an alarm; hastily contracts her fibres; and, like a person under apprehensions of violence, withdraws from our finger in a kind of precipitate disorder. Perhaps the beauty of her aspect might be sullied, or the niceness of her texture discomposed, by the human touch. Therefore, like a coy virgin, she recedes from all unbecoming familiarities, and will admit no such improper, if not pernicious freedoms.

Whatever be the cause of this unusual effect, it

* Gal. ii. 20. † Phil. iii. 10.

suggests an instructive admonition to the Christian. Such should be our apprehensive timorous care with regard to sin; and all, even the most distant, approaches of vice. So should we avoid the very appearance of evil, and stand aloof from every occasion of falling. If sinners entice; if forbidden pleasures tempt; or if opportunity beckon, with the gain of injustice in her hand: O! turn from the gilded snare; touch not the beauteous bane; but fly, fly with haste, fly without any delay, from the bewitching ruin. Does anger draw near with her lighted torch, or kindle the flame of resentment in our breasts? Does flattery ply our ears with her enchanting and intoxicating whispers? Would discontent lay her leaden hand upon our temper, and mould into our minds her sour leaven, in order to make us a burden to ourselves and unamiable to others? Instantly let us divert our attention from the dangerous objects; and not so much endeavour to antidote, as to shun, the moral contagion. Let us revolve in our meditations that wonderful meekness of our distressed Master, which, amidst the most abusive and provoking insults, maintained an uniform tenor of unshaken serenity. Let us contemplate that prodigious humiliation, which brought him, from an infinite height above all worlds, to make his bed in the dust of death. Let us soothe our jarring, our uneasy passions, with the remembrance of that cheerfulness and resignation, which rendered him, in the deepest poverty, unfeignedly thankful, and, under the heaviest tribulations, most submissively patient.

Harbour not, on any consideration, the betrayer of your virtue. Be deaf, inflexibly deaf, to every beguiling solicitation. If it obtrude into the unguarded

heart; give it entertainment, no, not for a moment. To parley with the enemy, is to open a door for destruction. Our safety consists in flight; and in this case, suspicion is the truest prudence, fear the greatest bravery. Play not on the brink of the precipice. Flutter not round the edges of the flame. Dally not with the stings of death: but reject, with a becoming mixture of solicitude and abhorrence, the very first insinuations of iniquity, as cautiously as the smarting sore shrinks even from the softest hand; as constantly as this jealous plant recoils at the approaching touch.*

Not long ago these curious productions of the spring were coarse and mis-shapen roots. Had we opened the earth, and beheld them in their seed, how uncouth and contemptible had their appearance been! But now they are the boast of nature; the delight of the

* The prophet Isaiah, in an elegant and lively description of the upright man, says, He shaketh his hands from holding of bribes; and, I may add from practising any kind of iniquity. The image, exceedingly beautiful and equally expressive, both illustrates and enforces the doctrine of this whole section. Shaketh his hands: just as a person would do, who happens to have burning coals fall into his lap, or some venomous creature fastening upon his flesh. In such a case none would stand a moment to consider or debate with himself the expediency of the thing. He would instantly fling off the pernicious encumbrance, instantly endeavour to disengage himself from the clinging mischief. Isai. xxxiii. 15.

I have represented the danger of not extinguishing immediately the very first sparks of temptation in a variety of views; because a proper behaviour, in this conjuncture, is of such vast importance to the purity, the safety, and the comforts of our minds; because I had the royal moralist in my eye, who, deterring his pupils from the path of the wicked, cries, with an air of deep concern, and in the language of vehement importunity; cries, Avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away. How strongly is the counsel urged by being so frequently repeated in such a remarkable diversity of concise and abrupt, consequently of forcible and pressing admonitions! Prov. iv. 15.

sons of men; finished patterns for enamelling and embroidery; outshining even the happiest strokes of the pencil. They are taught to bloom, but with a very inferior lustre, in the richest tapestries and most magnificent silks. Art never attempts to equal their incomparable elegancies, but places all her merit in copying after these delicate originals. Even those, who glitter in silver, or whose clothing is of wrought gold, are desirous to borrow additional ornaments from a sprig of jessamine or a little assemblage of pinks.

What a fine idea may we form from hence of the resurrection of the just, and the state of their reanimated bodies! As the roots even of our choicest flowers, when deposited in the ground, are rude and ungraceful, but when they spring up into blooming life are most elegant and splendid; so the flesh of a saint, when committed to the dust, alas! what is it? A heap of corruption; a mass of putrefying clay. But, when it obeys the great archangel's call, and starts into a new existence; what an astonishing change ensues! What a most ennobling improvement takes place! That which was sown in weakness, is raised in all the vivacity of power. That which was sown in deformity is raised in the bloom of celestial beauty. Exalted, refined and glorified, it will shine 'as the brightness of the firmament,' when it darts the inimitable blue through the fleeces, the snowy fleeces of some cleaving cloud.

Fear not then, thou faithful Christian; fear not at the appointed time to descend into the tomb. Thy soul thou mayst trust with thy omnipotent Redeemer, who is Lord of the unseen world; 'who has the keys of hell, and of death.' Most safely mayst thou trust

thy better part in those beneficent hands which were pierced with nails, and fastened to the ignominious tree, for thy salvation. With regard to thy earthly tabernacle, be not dismayed. It is taken down only to be rebuilt upon a diviner plan, and in a more heavenly form. If it retires into the shadow of death, and lies immured in the gloom of the grave, it is only to return from a short confinement to endless liberty. If it falls into dissolution, it is in order to rise more illustrious from its ruins, and wear an infinitely brighter face of perfection, and of glory.

Having now made my panegyric, let me next take up a lamentation for these loveliest productions of the vegetable world. For I foresee their approaching doom. Yet a little while, and all these pleasing scenes vanish. Yet a little while, and all the sweets of the breathing, all the beauties of the blooming spring, are no more. Every one of these amiable forms must be shrivelled to deformity and trodden to the earth. Significant resemblance this, of all created beauty. All flesh is grass; like the green herbage, liable and prone to fade. Nay, all the goodliness thereof, its finest accomplishments, and what the world universally admires, is as the flower of the field,* which loses its gloss, decays and perishes, more speedily than the grass itself. Behold then, ye brightest among the daughters of Eve; behold yourselves in this glass. See the charms of your persons eclipsed by the lustre of these little flowers; and the frailty of your state represented by their transient glories. A fever may scorch those polished veins; a consumption may emaciate the dimpling cheeks; and a load of unexpected sorrows depress those lively

* Isai. xl. 6.

spirits. Or should these disasters, in pity, spare the tender frame; yet age, inexorable age and wrinkles, will assuredly come at last; will wither all the fine features, and blast every sprightly grace.

Then, ye fair, when those sparkling eyes are darkened, and sink in their orbs; when they are rolling in agonies, or swimming in death, how will you sustain the affliction? how will you repair the loss? Apply your thoughts to religion. Attend to the one thing needful. Believe in, and imitate, the blessed Jesus. Then shall your souls mount up to the realms of happiness; when the well-proportioned clay is mingling with its mean original. The light of God's countenance will irradiate with matchless and consummate perfection, all their exalted faculties. Cleansed entirely from every dreg of corruption, like some unsullied mirror, they will reflect the complete image of their Creator's holiness. O! that you would thus dress your minds and prepare for the immortal state! Then, from shining among your fellow-creatures on earth, you shall be translated to shine around the throne of God. Then, from being the sweeteners of our life, and the delight of our eyes, here below, you shall pass, by an easy transition, into angels of light, and become 'an everlasting excellency, the joy of all generations.'

Yes; ye flowery nations; ye must all decay. Yonder lily, that looks like the queen of the gay creation; see, how gracefully it erects its majestic head! What an air of dignity and grandeur ennobles its aspect! For elevated mien, as well as for incomparable lustre, justly may it be preferred to the magnificent monarch of the east.* But, all stately and charming as it is, it

* Matt. vi. 29.

will hardly survive a few more days. That unspotted whiteness must quickly be tarnished; and the snowy form defiled in the dust.

As the lily pleases with the noble simplicity of its appearance; the tulip is admired for the gaiety and multiplicity of its colours. Never was cup, either painted or enamelled, with such a profusion of dyes. Its tinges are so glowing; its contrasts so strong; and the arrangement of them both, so elegant and artful! 'Twas lately the pride of the border, and the reigning beauty of the delightful season. As exquisitely fine as the rainbow, aud almost as extremely trausient, it spread for a little moment its glittering plumage, but has now laid all its variegated and superior honours down. Those radiant stripes are blended, alas! rudely blended with common mould.

To a graceful shape, and blooming complexion, the rose adds the most agreeable perfume. Our nostrils make it repeated visits, and are never weary of drinking in its sweets. A fragrance, so peculiarly rich and reviving, transpires from its opening tufts; that every one covets its acquaintance. How have I seen even the accomplished Clarissa, for whom so many votaries languish, fondly caressing this little flower! That lovely bosom, which is the seat of innocence and of virtue; whose least excellency it is to rival the delicacy of the purest snows; among a thousand charms of its own, thinks it possible to adopt another from the damask rose-bud. Yet even this universal favourite must fail. Its native balm cannot preserve it from putrefaction. Soon, soon, must it resign all those endearing qualities, and hang neglected on its stem, or drop despised to the ground.

One could wish, methinks, these most amiable of

the inanimate race a longer existence: but in vain: they fade almost as soon as they flourish; within less than a month their glories are extinct. Let the sun take a few more journeys through the sky, then visit this enchanting walk, and you will find nothing but a wretched wilderness of ragged or naked stalks—but (my soul exults in the thought) the garment of celestial glory, which shall ere long array the re-animated body, will never wax old. The illustrious robes of a Saviour's consummate righteousness, which even now adorn the justified spirits, are incorruptible and immortal. No moth can corrode their texture; no number of ages sully their brightness. The light of day may be quenched, and all the stars sink in obscurity; but the honours of 'just men made perfect,' are subject to no diminution. Inextinguishable and unfading is the lustre of their crown.

Yes; ye flowery nations, ye must all decay. Winter, like some enraged and irresistible conqueror, that carries fire and sword wherever he advances; that demolishes towns, depopulates countries, spreads slaughter and desolation on every side—so, just so, will winter, with his savage and unrelenting blasts, invade this beautiful prospect. The storms are gathering, and the tempests mustering their rage, to fall upon the vegetable kingdoms. They will ravage through the dominions of nature, and plunder her riches, and lay waste her charms. Then, ye trees, must ye stand stripped of your verdant apparel; and, ye fields, be spoiled of your waving treasures. Then the earth, disrobed of all her gay attire, must sit in sables, like a disconsolate widow. The sun too, who now rides in triumph round the world, and scatters gaiety from his radiant eye, will then look faintly

from the windows of the south, and, casting a short glance on our dejected world, will leave us to the uncomfortable gloom of tedious nights. Then these pretty choristers of the air will chant no more to the gentle gales; the lark, the linnet, and all the feathered songsters, adandon their notes and indulge their woes. The harmony of the woods is at an end; and silence (unless it be interrupted by howling winds,) a sullen silence, sits brooding upon the boughs, which are now made vocal by a thousand warbling throats.

But (sweet recollection! ravishing expectation!) the songs of saints in light never admit a pause for sadness. All heaven will resound with the melody of their gratitude, and all eternity echo to their triumphant acclamations. The hallelujahs of that world, and the harmonious joy of its inhabitants will be as lasting as the divine perfections they celebrate. Come then, holy love, and tune my heart; descend, celestial fire, and touch my tongue, that I may stand ready to strike up, and bear my part in that great hosanna, that everlasting hymn.

Yes, yes, ye flowery nations, ye must all decay. And, indeed, could you add the strength of an oak, or the stability of a pyramid, to all the delicacy of your texture; yet short, exceeding short, even then, would your duration be. For I see, that all things come to an end. The pillars of nature are tottering. The foundations of the round world are falling away. 'The heavens themselves wax old like a garment.' But, amidst these views of general ruin, here is our refuge; this is our consolation; we know that our Redeemer liveth. Thy years, blessed Jesus, shall not fail. From everlasting to everlasting. Thou art

still the same; the same most excellent and adorable person! the same omnipotent and faithful friend; the same all-sufficient and inestimable portion. O! may we but partake of thy merits, be sanctified by thy grace, and received into thy glory! Then perish, if ye will, all inferior delights. Let all that is splendid in the skies, expire; and all that is amiable in nature, be expunged. Let the whole extent of creation be turned again into one undistinguishable void, one universal blank. Yet if God be ours, we shall have enough. If God be ours, we shall have all, and abound;* all that our circumstances can want, or our wishes crave, to make us inconceivably blessed and happy; blessed and happy, not only through this little interval of time, but through the immeasurable revolutions of eternity.

The sun is now come forth in his strength, and beats fiercely upon my throbbing pulse. Let me retire to yonder inviting arbour. There the woodbines retain the lucid drop; there the jessamines, which line the verdant alcove, are still impearled, and deliciously wet with dews. Welcome, ye refreshing shades! I feel, I feel, your cheering influence. My languid spirits revive; the slackened sinews are new strung; and life bounds brisker through all her crimson channels.

Reclined on this mossy couch, and surrounded by this fragrant coldness, let me renew my aspirations to the ever-present Deity. Here, let me remember and imitate the pious Augustine and his mother Monica; who, being engaged in discourse on the beauties of

* His hand the good man fastens on the skies,
And bids earth roll, nor feels the idle whirl.
Night Thoughts, N. iv.

the visible creation, rose, by these ladders, to the glories of the invisible state; till they were inspired with the most affecting sense of their super-eminent excellency, and actuated with the most ardent breathings after their full enjoyment; insomuch, that they were almost wrapt up into the bliss they contemplated; and scarce 'knew, whether they were in the body, or out of the body.'

When tempests toss the ocean; when plaintive signals of distress are heard from the bellowing deep; and melancholy tokens of shipwreck come floating on the foaming surge; then, how delightful to stand safe on shore, and hug one's self in conscious security!* When a glut of waters bursts from some mighty torrent, rushes headlong over all the neighbouring plains, sweeps away the helpless cattle, and drives the affrighted shepherd from his hut; then, from the top of a distant eminence, to descry the danger we need not fear; how pleasing! — Such methinks, is my present situation. For now the sun blazes from on high; the air glows with his fire; the fields are rent with chinks; the roads are scorched to dust; the woods seem to contract a sickly aspect, and a russet hue; the traveller, broiled as he rides, hastens to his inn, and intermits his journey; the labourer, bathed in sweat, drops the scythe, and desists from his work; the cattle flee to some shady covert, or else pant and toss under the burning noon.

* As Lucretius gave the hint for these observations, so he assigns the reason of the pleasure specified. It arises, not from the consideration of another's misery; this would argue the rankest malevolence: but from the agreeable contemplation of our own personal safety; which, while we view circumstances that are pernicious to others, but harmless to ourselves, is not a little heightened by the contrast. Suave mari magno, &c.

Even the stubborn rock, smit with the piercing beams, is ready to cleave. All things languish beneath the dazzling deluge—while I shall enjoy a cool hour, and calm reflection, amidst the gloom of this bowery recess, which scarce admits one speck of sunshine.

Thus, may both the flock and their shepherd dwell beneath the defence of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.* Then, though the pestilence walketh in darkness, and the sickness destroyeth at noon-day; though thousands fall beside us, and ten thousands at our right hand; we need fear no evil.† Either the destroying angel shall pass over our houses; or else he shall dispense the corrections of a friend, not the scourges of an enemy; which, instead of hurting us, shall work for our good. Then, though profaneness and infidelity, far more malignant evils, breathe deadly contagion, and taint the morals of multitudes around us; yet, if the great Father of Spirits 'hide us in the hollow of his hand,' we shall hold fast our integrity, and be faithful unto death.

Let then, dearest Lord, O! let thy servant and the people committed to his care, be received into thy protection. Let us take sanctuary under that tree of life, erected in thy ignominious cross. Let us fly for safety to that city of refuge, opened in thy bleeding wounds. These shall be a sacred hiding-place, not to be pierced by the flames of divine wrath, or the fiery darts of temptation. Thy dying merits, and perfect obedience, shall be to our souls, as rivers of water in

* Psalm xci. 1.

† This was written when a very infectious and mortal distemper raged in the neighbourhood.

a dry place, or as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*

But most of all, in that last tremendous day, when the heavens are rent asunder, and wrapped up like a scroll; when thy Almighty arm shall arrest the sun in his career, and dash to pieces the structure of the universe; when the dead, both small and great, shall be gathered before the throne of thy glory; and the fates of all mankind hang on the very point of a final irreversible decision:—Then, blessed Jesus, let us be owned by Thee, and we shall not be ashamed; defended by Thee, and we shall not be afraid. O! may we, at that awful, that unutterably important juncture, be covered with the wings of thy redeeming love; and we shall behold all the horrible convulsions of expiring nature, with composure, with comfort! We shall even welcome the dissolution of all things, as the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.†

There are, I perceive, who still attend the flowers; and, in defiance of the sun, ply their work on every expanded blossom. The bees I mean; that nation of chemists, to whom nature has communicated the rare and valuable secret, of enriching themselves without impoverishing others; who extract the most delicious syrup from every fragrant herb, without wounding its substance, or diminishing its odours. I take the more notice of these ingenious operators, because I would willingly make them my pattern. While the gay butterfly flutters her painted wings, and sips a little fantastic delight only for the present moment; while the gloomy spider, worse than idly busied, is preparing his insidious nets for destruction,

* Isai. xxxii. 2. † Acts iii. 19.

or sucking venom, even from the most wholesome plants; this frugal community are wisely employed in providing for futurity, and collecting a copious stock of the most balmy treasures. And O! might these meditations sink into my soul! Would the God, who suggested each heavenly thought, vouchsafe to convert it into an established principle; to determine all my inclinations, and regulate my whole conduct! I should then gather advantages from the same blooming objects, more precious than your golden stores, ye industrious artists. I also should go home, laden with the richest sweets and the noblest spoils; though I crop not a leaf, nor call a single flower my own.

Here I behold, assembled in one view, almost all the various beauties which have been severally entertaining my imagination. The vistas, struck through an ancient wood, or formed by rows of venerable elms, conducting the spectator's observation to some remarkable object, or leading the traveller's footsteps to this delightful seat; the walls enriched with fruit trees, and faced with a covering of their leafy extensions; I should rather have said, hung with different pieces of nature's noblest tapestry; the walks neatly shorn and lined with verdure, or finely smoothed and coated with gravel; the alleys arched with shades to embower our noon-tide repose, or thrown open for the free accession of air to invite us to our evening recreation; the decent edgings of box, which inclose, like a plain selvage, each beautiful compartment, and its splendid figures; the shapely evergreens and flowering shrubs, which strike the eye, and appear with peculiar dignity in this distant situation; the bason with its crystal fount floating in the centre, and

diffusing an agreeable freshness through the whole; the waters, falling from a remote cascade, and gently murmuring as they flow along the pebbles; these, added to the rest, and all so disposed, that each recommends and endears each, render the whole a most sweet ravishing scene of order and variety, of elegance and magnificence.

From so many lovely prospects clustering upon the sight, it is impossible not to be reminded of heaven; that world of bliss, those regions of light, where the Lamb that was slain manifests his beatific presence, and his saints live for evermore. But O! what pencil can sketch out a draught of that goodly land! What colours or what style can express the splendours of Immanuel's kingdom! Would some celestial hand draw aside the veil but for one moment, and permit us to throw a single glance on those divine abodes; how would all sublunary possessions become tarnished in our eyes, and grow flat upon our taste! A glimpse, a transient glimpse of those unutterable beatitudes would captivate our souls and engross all their faculties. Eden itself, after such a vision, would appear a cheerless desert, and all earthly charms intolerable deformity.

Very excellent things are spoken of thee, thou city of God.* Volumes have been written, and those by inspired men, to display the wonders of thy perfections. All that is rich and resplendent in the visible creation has been called in to aid our conceptions, and elevate our ideas; but indeed, no tongue can utter, no pen can describe, no fancy can imagine, what God, of his unbounded munificence, has prepared for them that love him. Seeing then, that all

* Psal. lxxxvii. 2.

terrestrial things must come to a speedy end, and there remaineth a rest, a blissful and everlasting rest, for the people of God; let me never be too fondly attached to any present satisfactions; weaned from whatever is temporal, may I maintain a superior indifference for such transitory enjoyments! but long, long earnestly for the mansions that are above, the paradise 'which the Lord hath planted, and not man.' Thither may I transmit the chief of my conversation, and from thence expect the whole of my happiness. Be that the sacred powerful magnet which ever influences my heart, ever attracts my affections; there are such transcendent glories, as eye has not seen; there are such transporting pleasures as ear has not heard; there is such a fulness of joy, as the thought of man cannot conceive.

Into that consummate felicity, those eternal fruitions; permit me, Madam, to wish you, in due time, an abundant entrance; and to assure you, that this wish is breathed with the same sincerity and ardour for my honoured correspondent, as it is Madam, for

Your most obedient, &c.

J. Hervey.

A

DESCANT UPON CREATION.

If the reader pleases to look back on page 120; he will find me engaged by a promissory note, to subjoin a descant upon Creation.

To know the love of Christ; to have such a deep apprehension of his unspeakable kindness, as may produce in our hearts an adoring gratitude and an unfeigned faith; this, according to St. Paul's estimate, is the highest and happiest attainment in the sacred science of Christianity.* What follows is an attempt to assist the attentive mind in learning a line or two of that best and greatest lesson; it introduces the most conspicuous parts of the visible system, as so many prompters to our dull affections; each suggesting a hint adapted to the important occasion, and suited to its respective character.

Can there be a more powerful incentive to devout gratitude, than to consider the magnificent and delicate scenes of the universe, with a particular reference to Christ, as the Creator? Every object, viewed in this light, will surely administer incessant recruits to the languishing lamp of divine love. Every production in nature will strike a spark into the soul, and the whole creation concur to raise the smoking flax into a flame.

* Eph. iii. 19

Can any thing impart a stronger joy to the believer, or more effectually confirm his faith in the crucified Jesus, than to behold the heavens declaring his glory, and the firmanent showing his handy-work? Surely it must be matter of inexpressible consolation to the poor sinner, to observe the honours of his Redeemer written with sunbeams over all the face of the world.

We delight to read an account of our incarnate Jehovah, as he is revealed in the books of Moses and the prophets, as he is displayed in the writings of the evangelists and apostles. Let us also endeavour to see a sketch of his perfections, as they stand delineated in that stately volume, where every leaf is a spacious plain; every line, a flowing brook; every period, a lofty mountain.

Should any of my readers be unexercised in such speculations, I beg leave (in pursuance of my promise) to present them with a specimen, or to offer a clue, which may possibly lead their minds into this most improving and delightful train of thinking.

Should any be inclined to suspect the solidity of the following observations, or to condemn them as the voice of rant, and the lawless flight of fancy; I must entreat such persons to recollect, that the grand doctrine, the hinge on which they all turn, is warranted and established by the unanimous testimony of the inspired penmen, who frequently celebrate Immanuel, or Christ Jesus, as the great Almighty Cause of all; assuring us that all things were created by him and for him, and that in him all things consist.*

On such a subject, what is wonderful is far from

* Col. i. 16, 17.

being extravagant. To be wonderful, is the inseparable characteristic of God and his works, especially of that most distinguished and glorious event of the divine works, redemption; so glorious, that 'all the miracles in Egypt, and the marvellous acts in the field of Zoan;' all that the Jewish annals have recorded, or the human ear has heard, all dwindle into trivial events, are scarce worthy to be remembered,* in comparison of this infinitely grand and infinitely gracious transaction. Kindled, therefore, into pleasing astonishment by such a survey, let me give full scope to my meditations; let me pour out my whole soul on the boundless subject; not much regarding the limits which cold criticism, or colder unbelief, might prescribe.

O ye angels, that surround the throne; ye princes of heaven 'that excel in strength,' and are clothed with transcendent brightness; he, who placed you in those stations of exalted honour, and dignified your nature with such illustrious endowments; he, whom you all obey and all adore: he took not on him the angelic form, but was made flesh, and found in fashion as a man. Like us wretched mortals, he was subject to weariness, pain, and every infirmity, sin only excepted; that we might one day be raised to your sublime abodes, be adopted into your blissful society, and join with your transported choir in giving glory to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever.†

O ye heavens, whose azure arches rise immensely high, and stretch immeasurably wide; stupendous amphitheatre! amidst whose vast expansive circuit, orbs of the most dreadful grandeur are perpetually

* Isa. xliii. 18. † Rev. v. 13.

running their amazing races; unfathomable depths of ether! where worlds unnumbered float, and, to our limited sight, worlds unnumbered are lost; he who adjusted your dimensions with his span, and formed the magnificent structure with his word; he was once wrapt in swaddling-clothes, and laid in a manger; that the benefits accruing to his people, through his most meritorious humiliation, might have no other measure of their value than immensity; might run parallel, in their duration with eternity.

Ye stars, that beam with inextinguishable brilliancy through the midnight sky; oceans of flame and centres of worlds, though seemingly little points of light! he who shone with essential effulgence, innumerable ages before your twinkling tapers were kindled, and will shine with everlasting majesty and beauty when your places in the firmament shall be known no more; he was involved for many years in the deepest obscurity; lay concealed in the contemptible city Nazareth; lay disguised under the mean habit of a carpenter's son; that he might plant the heavens* as it were with new constellations, and array these clods of earth, these houses of clay, with a radiancy far superior to yours; a radiancy which will adorn the very heaven of heavens, when you shall vanish away like smoke,† or expire as momentary sparks from the smitten steel.

Comets, that sometimes shoot into the illimitable

* Isai. ii. 16.

† Alluding to a passage in Isaiah, which is, I think, grand and elevated beyond all comparison. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die like the feeble insect; but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation shall not be abolished. Isa. ii. 6.

tracts of ether, farther than the discernment of our eye is able to follow; sometimes return from the long, long excursion, and sweep our affrighted hemisphere with your enormous fiery train; that sometimes make near approaches to the sun, and burn almost in his immediate beams; sometimes retire to the remotest distance, and freeze for ages in the excessive rigours of winter: he, who at his sovereign pleasure withdraws the blazing wonder, or leads forth the portentous stranger to shake terror over guilty kingdoms; he was overwhelmed with the most shocking amazement, and plunged into the deepest anxiety; was chilled with apprehensions of fear, and scorched by the flames of avenging wrath; that I, and other depraved rebellious creatures, might not be eternally agitated with the extremes of jarring passions; opposite, yet on either side tormenting; far more tormenting to the soul than the severest degrees of your heat and cold to the human sense.

Ye planets, that, winged with unimaginable speed, traverse the regions of the sky; sometimes climbing millions and millions of miles above, sometimes descending as far below the great axle of your motions: ye that are so minutely faithful to the vicissitudes of day and night, so exactly punctual in bringing on the changes of your respective stations: he who launched you at first from his mighty arm; who continually impels you with such wonderful rapidity, and guides you with such perfect regularity; who fixes 'the habitation of his holiness and his glory,' infinite heights above your scanty rounds; he once became a helpless infant, sojourned in our inferior world, fled from the persecutor's sword, and wandered as a vagabond in a foreign land; that he might lead our feet

into the way of peace: that he might bring us aliens near to God, bring us exiles home to heaven.

Thou sun, inexhausted source of light, and heat, and comfort! who, without the assistance of any other fire, sheddest day through a thousand realms, and not confining thy munificence to realms only, extendest thy enlightening influences to surrounding worlds; prime cheerer of the animal, and great enlivener of the vegetable tribes! so beautiful in thyself, so beneficial in thy effects, that erring heathens addressed thee with adorations, and mistook thee for their Maker! He who filled thy orb with a profusion of lustre, before whom thy meridian splendours are but a shade; he divested himself of his all-transcending distinctions, and drew a veil over the effulgence of his divinity; that, by speaking to us face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend, he might dispel our intellectual darkness. His 'visage was marred,'* and he became the scorn of men, the outcast of the people; that, by this manifestation of his unutterably tender regard for our welfare, he might diffuse many a gleam of joy through our dejected minds; that, in another state of things, he might clothe even our fallen nature with the honours of that magnificent luminary, and give all the righteous to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

Thou moon, that walkest among the host of stars, and in thy lucid appearance art superior to them all; fair ruler of the night; sometimes half restoring the day with thy waxing brightness; sometimes waning into dimness, and scarcely scattering the nocturnal gloom; sometimes covered with sackcloth, and alarming the gazing nations: he who dresses thy opaque

* Isa. lii. 14.

globe in beaming but borrowed silver; he whose dignity is unchangeable, underived, and all his own; he vouchsafed to wear a body of clay; he was content to appear as in a bloody eclipse, shorn of his resplendent beams, and surrounded with a night of horror, which knew not one reviving ray. Thus has he empowered his church and all believers, to tread the moon under their feet.* Hence, inspired with the hope of brighter glory and more enduring bliss, are they enabled to triumph over all the vain anxieties and vainer amusements of this sublunary, precarious, mutable world.

Ye thunders, that, awfully grumbling in the distant clouds, seem to meditate indignation, and form the first essays of a far more frightful peal, or suddenly bursting over our heads, rend the vault above, and shake the ground below, with the hideous, horrid crack: ye that send your tremendous volleys from pole to pole, startling the savage herds,† and astonishing the human race: he who permits terror to sound her trumpet in your deep, prolonged, enlarging, aggravated roar; he uttered a feeble infantile cry in the stable, and strong expiring groans on the accursed tree; that he might, in the gentlest accents, whisper peace to our souls, and at length tune our voices to the melody of heaven.

O ye lightnings, that brood, and lie couchant in the sulphureous vapours; that glance, with forked fury, from the angry gloom, swifter and fiercer than the lion rushes from his den; or open into vast expansive sheets of flame, sublimely waved over the prostrate world, and fearfully lingering in the affrighted skies: ye, that formerly laid in ashes the

* Rev. xii. 1. † Psal. xxix. 8.

licentious abodes of lust and violence; that will, ere long, set on fire the elements, and co-operate in the conflagration of the globe: he who kindles your flash, and directs you when to sally, and where to strike; he who commissions your whirling bolts, whom to kill and whom to spare; he resigned his sacred person to the most barbarous indignities, submitted his beneficent hands to the ponderous hammer and the piercing nail, yea, withheld not his heart, his very heart, from the stab of the executioner's spear; and, instead of flashing confusion on his outrageous tormentors, instead of plunging them to the depths of hell with his frown, he cried—in his last moments, and with his agonizing lips, he cried, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!—O! what a pattern of patience for his saints! what an object of admiration for angels! what a constellation of every mild, amiable, and benign virtue; shining, in this hour of darkness, with ineffable splendour and beauty!—Hence, hence, it is, that we are not trembling under the lightnings of Mount Sinai; that we are not blasted by the flames of divine vengeance; or doomed to dwell with everlasting burnings.

Ye frowning wintry clouds; oceans pendant in the air, and burdening the winds: he, in whose hand you are an overflowing scourge, or by whose appointment an arsenal of warlike stores: he who opens your sluices, and a flood gushes forth, to destroy the fruits of the earth, and drown the husbandman's hopes; who moulds you into frozen balls, and you are shot, linked with death,* on the troops of his enemies: he,

* Job has informed us, for what purpose the magazines of the firmament are stocked with hail. That they may be ready against the day of battle and war. Job xxxviii. 23.

instead of discharging the furiousness of his wrath upon this guilty head, poured out his prayers, poured out his sighs, poured out his very soul, for me and my fellow-transgressors; that by virtue of his inestimable propitiation, the overflowings of divine goodwill might be extended to sinful men; that the skies might pour down righteousness; and peace, on her downy wings, peace with her balmy blessings, descend to dwell on earth.

Ye vernal clouds, furls of finer air, folds of softer moisture: he who draws you in copious exhalations from the briny deep, bids you leave every distasteful quality behind, and become floating fountains of sweetest waters: he, who dissolves you into gentle rain, and dismisses you in fruitful showers; who kindly commissions you to drop down fatness as you fall, and to scatter flowers over the field: he, in the unutterable bitterness of his spirit, was without any comforting sense of his Almighty Father's presence; he, when his bones were burnt up like a fire-brand, had not one drop of that sacred consolation which, on many of his afflicted servants, has been distilled as the evening dews, and has 'given songs in the night' of distress; that, from this unallayed and inconsolable anguish of our all-gracious Master, we, as from a well of salvation, might derive large draughts of spiritual refreshment.

Joshua has recorded what terrible slaughter has been made by those missive weapons of the Almighty. Josh. x. 11. Modern historians relate, that when Edward III. invaded France, a shower of hailstones descended, of such a prodigious size, that six thousand horses, and one thousand men, were struck dead instantaneously. But the most dreadful description of this great ordnance of the heavens is given us in Rev. xvi. 24. There fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent.

Thou grand ethereal bow, whose beauties flush the firmament, and charm every spectator: he who paints thee on the fluid skirts of the sky, who decks thee with all the pride of colours, and bends thee into that graceful and majestic figure; at whose command thy vivid streaks sweetly rise, or swiftly fade: he, through all his life, was arrayed in the humble garb of poverty, and at his exit wore the gorgeous garment of contempt; insomuch that even his own familiar friends, ashamed or afraid to own him, 'hid as it were their faces from him;'* to teach us a becoming disdain for the unsubstantial and transitory glitter of all worldly vanities; to introduce us, in robes brighter than the tinges of thy resplendent arch, even in the robes of his own immaculate righteousness, to introduce us before that august and venerable throne, which the peaceful rainbow surrounds, surrounds as a pledge of inviolable fidelity and infinite mercy.

Ye storms and tempests, which vex the continent, and toss the seas; which dash navies on the rocks, and drive forests from their roots: he, whose breath rouses you into such resistless fury, and whose nod controls you in your wildest career; he, who holds the rapid and raging hurricane in straitened reins, and walks, dreadfully serene, on the very wings of the wind: he went, all meek and gentle, like a lamb to the slaughter for us: and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. Thus are we instructed to bear, with decent magnanimity, the various assaults of adversity; and to pass, with a becoming tranquillity of temper, through all the rude blasts of injurious treatment. Thus are we

* Isai. liii. 3

delivered from the unutterably fiercer storms of incensed and inexorable justice, from the 'fire, the brimstone, and the horrible tempest, which will be the final portion of the ungodly.'

Thou pestilence, that scatterest ten thousand poisons from thy baleful wings, tainting the air, and infecting the nations; under whose malignant influence, joy is blasted, and nature sickens; mighty regions are depopulated, and once crowded cities are left without inhabitants: he, who arms thee with inevitable destruction, and bids thee march before his angry countenance;* to spread desolation among the tents of the wicked, and be the forerunner of far more fearful indignation: he, in his holy humanity, was arraigned as a criminal; and, though innocence itself, yea, the very pattern of perfection, was condemned to die like the most execrable miscreant. As a nuisance to society and the very bane of the public happiness, he was hurried away to execution, and hammered to the gibbet; that by his blood, he might prepare a sovereign medicine, to cure us of a more fatal distemper than the pestilence which walketh in darkness, or the sickness which destroyeth at noonday; that he might himself say to our last enemy; 'O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction.'†

Heat, whose burning influence parches the Libyan wilds, tans into soot the Ethiopian's complexion, and makes every species of life pant, and droop, and languish: Cold, whose icy breath glazes yearly the Russian seas, often glues the frozen sailor to the cordage, and stiffens the traveller into a statue of

* Before him went the pestilence, Hab. iii. 5.
† Hos. xiii. 14.

rigid flesh: he, who sometimes blends you both, and produces the most agreeable temperature; sometimes suffers you to act separately, and rage with intolerable severity: that King of Heaven, and Controller of universal Nature, when dwelling in a tabernacle of clay, was exposed to chilling damps, and smitten by sultry beams. The stars, in their midnight watches, heard him pray; and the sun, in his meridian fervours, saw him toil. Hence are our frozen hearts dissolved into a mingled flow of wonder, love, and joy; being conscious of a deliverance from those insufferable flames, which kindled by divine indignation, burn to the lowest hell.

Thou ocean, vast world of waters! he, who sunk that capacious bed for thy reception, and poured the liquid element into unfathomable channels; before whom all thy foaming billows and floating mountains are as the small drop of a bucket; who, by the least intimation of his will, swells thy fluid kingdoms, in wild confusion, to mingle with the clouds; or reduces them in calm composure to slumber on the shores: he, who once gave thee a warrant to overwhelm the whole earth, and bury all its degenerate inhabitants in a watery grave; but has now laid an everlasting embargo on thy boisterous waves, and bound thee, all fierce and maddening as thou art, in chains stronger than adamant, yet formed of despicable sand:—all the waves of vengeance and wrath, of tribulation and anguish, passed over his crucified body, and his agonizing soul; that we might emerge from those depths of misery, from that abyss of guilt, into which we were plunged by Adam's fall, and more irretrievably sunk by our own transgressions; that, at the last, we might be restored to that happy

world, which is represented, in the vision of God, as having 'no sea;'* to denote its perpetual stability and undisturbed serenity.

Ye mountains, that overlook the clouds, and project a shade into distant provinces; everlasting pyramids of nature, not to be shaken by conflicting elements, not to be shattered by the bolts of thunder, nor impaired even by the ravages of time; he who bid your ridges rise so high, and your foundations stand so fast; he, in whose scale you are lighter than dust; in whose eye you are less than nothing: he sunk beneath a load of woes; woes insupportable, but not his own; when he took our iniquities upon himself, and heaved the more than mountainous burden from a guilty world.

Ye verdant woods, that crown our hills, and are crowned yourselves with leafy honours: ye humble shrubs, adorned in spring with opening blossoms, and fanned in summer by gentle gales; ye, that in distant climes, or in cultivated gardens, breathe out spicy odours, and embalm the air with delightful perfumes; your all-glorious and ever-blessed Creator's head was incircled with the thorny wreath; his face was defiled with contumelious spitting, and his body bathed in a bloody sweat; that he might wear the crown, the crown of glory which fadeth not away; and live for evermore, surrounded with delights, as much surpassing yours, as yours exceed the rugged desolations of winter.

Thou mantling vine; he who hangs on thy slender shoots, the rich, transparent, weighty cluster; who, under thy unornamented foliage, and amidst the pores of thy otherwise worthless bough, prepares the

* Rev. xxi. 1.

liquor—the refined and exalted liquor, which cheers the nations, and fills the cup of joy: Trees, whose branches are elevated and waving in air, or diffused in easy confinement along a sunny wall: he, who bends you with a lovely burden of delicious fruits, whose genial warmth beautifies their rind, and mellows their taste; he, when voluntarily subject to our wants, instead of being refreshed with your generous juices, or regaled with your luscious pulp; had a loathsome potion of vinegar, mingled with gall, addressed to his lips; that we might sit under the shadow of his merits with great tranquillity and the utmost complacency; that, ere long, being admitted into the Paradise of God, we might eat of the Tree of Life,* and drink new wine with him in his Father's kingdom.

Ye luxuriant meadows; he who, without the seedsman's industry, replenishes your irriguous lap with never-failing crops of herbage, and enamels their cheerful green with flowers of every hue: Ye fertile fields; he who blesses the labours of the husbandman, enriches your well-tilled plains with waving harvests, and calls forth the staff of life from your furrow; he, who causes both meadows and fields to laugh and sing for the abundance of plenty; he was no stranger to corroding hunger, and parching thirst; he, alas! ate the bitter bread of woe, and had 'plenteousness of tears to drink,' that we might partake of richer dainties than those which are produced by the dew of heaven, and proceed from the fatness of the earth; that we might feed on 'the hidden manna,' and eat the bread which giveth life, eternal life, unto the world.

* Rev. ii. 7.

Ye mines, rich in yellow ore, or bright with veins of silver; that distribute your shining treasures as far as winds can waft the vessel of commerce; that bestow your alms on monarchs, and have princes for your pensioners: Ye beds of gems, toy-shops of nature! which form, in dark retirement, the glittering stone; diamonds, that sparkle with a brilliant water; rubies, that glow with a crimson flame; emeralds, dipped in the freshest verdure of spring; sapphires, decked with the fairest drapery of the sky; topaz, emblazed with the golden gleam; amethyst, impurpled with the blushes of the morning: he who tinctures the metallic dust, and consolidates the lucid drop; he, when sojourning on earth, had no riches but the riches of disinterested benevolence; had no ornament, but the ornament of unspotted purity. Poor he was in his circumstances, and mean in all his accommodations; that we might be rich in grace, and 'obtain salvation with eternal glory:' that we might inhabit the new Jerusalem, that splendid city, whose streets are paved with gold; whose gates are formed of pearl; and the walls garnished with all manner of precious stones.*

Ye gushing fountains, that trickle potable silver through the matted grass: Ye fine transparent streams, that glide in crystal waves along your fringed banks: Ye deep and stately rivers, that wind and wander in your course, to spread your favours wide; that gladden kingdoms in your progress, and augment the sea with your tribute: he who supplies all your currents from his own ever-flowing and inexhaustible liberality; he, when his nerves were racked with exquisite pain, and his blood inflamed by a raging fever, cried,

* Rev. xxi. 19—21.

I thirst, and was denied (unparalleled hardship!) in this great extremity, was denied the poor refreshment of a single drop of water; that we, having all-sufficiency in all things, might abound to every good work; might be filled with the fullness of his spiritual blessings here, and hereafter be satisfied with the fulness of joy which is at God's right hand for evermore.

Ye birds, cheerful tenants of the bough, gaily dressed in glossy plumage; who wake the morn, and solace the groves with your artless lays: inimitable architects! who, without rule or line, build your pensile structures with all the nicety of proportion; you have each his commodious nest, roofed with shades and lined with warmth to protect and cherish the callow brood; but he, who tuned your throats to harmony, and taught you that curious skill; he was a man of sorrows, and had not where to lay his head; had not where to lay his head, till he felt the pangs of dissolution, and was laid in the silent grave; that we, dwelling under the wings of omnipotence, and resting in the bosom of infinite love, might spend an harmonious eternity in 'singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb.'

Bees, industrious workmen! that sweep, with busy wing, the flowery garden; and search the blooming heath; and sip the mellifluous dews: strangers to idleness! that ply, with incessant assiduity, your pleasing task, and suffer no opening blossom to pass unexplored, no sunny gleam to slip away unimproved: most ingenious artificers! that cling to the fragrant buds, drain them of their treasured sweets, and extract (if I may so speak) even the odoriferous souls of herbs, and plants, and flowers; you, when you have

completed your work; have collected, refined, and securely lodged the ambrosial stores; when you might reasonably expect the peaceful fruition of your acquisitions; you, alas! are barbarously destroyed, and leave your hoarded delicacies to others: leave them to be enjoyed by your very murderers. I cannot but pity your hard destiny! How then should my bowels melt with sympathy, and my eyes flow with tears,* when I remember, that thus, thus it fared with your and our Incarnate Maker! After a life of the most exemplary and exalted piety; a life, filled with offices of beneficence and labours of love; he was, by wicked hands, crucified and slain. He left the honey of his toil, the balm of his blood, and the riches of his obedience, to be shared among others; to be shared even among those, who too often crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame.

Shall I mention the animal, which spins her soft, her shining, her exquisitely fine silken thread; whose matchless manufactures lend an ornament to grandeur, and make royalty itself more magnificent? Shall I take notice of the cell, in which, when the gaiety and business of life are over, the little recluse immures herself and spends the remainder of her days in retirement? Shall I rather observe the sepulchre, which, when cloyed with pleasure and weary of the world, she prepares for her own interment? Or how, when a stated period is elapsed, she wakes from a deathlike inactivity, breaks the inclosure of her tomb, throws off the dusky shroud, assumes a new form, puts on a more sumptuous array, and, from an insect

* Canst thou, ungrateful man, his torments see,
Nor drop a tear for him, who pour'd his blood for thee?
Pitt's Poems.

creeping on the ground, becomes a winged inhabitant of the air? No: this is a poor reptile; and therefore unworthy to serve as an illustration, when any character of the Son of God comes under consideration. But let me correct myself. Was not Christ (to use the language of his own blessed Spirit) a worm, and no man?* in appearance such, and treated as such? Did he not also bequeath the fine linen of his most perfect righteousness to compose the marriage-garment for our disarrayed and defiled souls? Did he not, before his flesh saw corruption, emerge triumphant from the grave; and not only mount the lower firmament, but ascend the heaven of heavens, take possession of those sublime abodes, in our name, and as our forerunner?

Ye cattle, that rest in your inclosed pastures; ye beasts, that range the unlimited forest; ye fish, that rove through trackless paths of the sea; sheep, clad in garments, which, when left by you, are worn by kings; kine, who feed on verdure, which, transmuted in your bodies, and strained from your udders, furnishes a repast for queens; lions, roaring after your prey; leviathan, taking your pastime in the great deep; with all that wing the firmament, or tread the soil, or swim the wave: He who spreads his ever-hospitable board, who admits you all to be his continual guests, and suffers you to want no manner of thing that is good; he was destitute, afflicted, tormented; he endured all that was miserable and reproachful, in order to exalt a degenerate race, who had debased themselves to a level with the beasts that perish, unto seats of distinguished and immortal honour, in order to introduce the slaves of sin and

* Psalm xxii. 6.

heirs of hell into mansions of consummate and everlasting bliss.

Surely the contemplation of such a subject, and the distant anticipation of such a hope, may almost turn earth into heaven, and make even inanimate nature vocal with praise. Let it then break forth from every creature. Let the meanest feel the inspiring impulse; let the greatest acknowledge themselves unable, worthily to express the stupendous goodness.

Praise him, ye insects that crawl on the ground; who, though high above all height, humbled himself to dwell in dust. Birds of the air, waft on your wings, and warble in your notes, his praise, who, though Lord of the celestial abodes, while sojourning on earth, wanted a shelter commodious as your nests. Ye rougher world of brutes, join with the gentle songsters of the shade, and howl to him your hoarse applause, who breaks the jaw-bones of the infernal lion, who softens into mildness the savage disposition, and bids the wolf lie down, in amicable agreement, with the lamb. Bleat out, ye hills; let broader lows be responsive from the vales; ye forests catch, and ye rocks retain, the inarticulate hymn; because Messiah the Prince feeds his flock like a shepherd; he gathereth the lambs with his arm; he carries them in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young.* Wave, ye stately cedars, in sign of worship, wave your branching heads to him, who meekly bowed his own on the accursed tree. Pleasing prospects, scenes o beauty, where nicest art conspires with lavish nature to form a paradise below, lay forth all your charms, and in all your charms confess yourselves a mere blank, compared with his amiableness, who is 'fairest

* Isaiah xl. 11.

among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.' Drop down, ye showers; and testify, as you fall; testify of his grace, which descends more copiously than the rain, distills more sweetly than the dew. Let sighing gales breathe, and murmuring rivulets flow; breathe and flow in harmonious consonance to him, whose Spirit is far more reviving than the cooling breeze, who is himself the Fountain of living Waters.

Ye lightnings, blaze to his honour; ye thunders, sound his praise; while reverberating clouds return the roar, and bellowing oceans propagate the tremendous anthem. Mutest of creatures, add your silent oratory, and display the triumphs of his meekness; who, though he maketh the clouds his chariot, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea; though the thunder is his voice, and the lightning his sword of justice; yet, amidst the most abusive and cruel injuries, was submissive and lifted not his hand, was 'dumb and opened not his mouth.' Great source of day, address thy radiant homage to a far sublimer sun. Write, in all thy ample round, with every lucid beam, O! write a testimony to him, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, who is the Sun of righteousness to a sinful world; and is risen, never to go down; is risen, to be our everlasting light. Shine clear, ye skies; look gay, thou earth; let the floods clap their hands, and let every creature wear a smile: for he cometh, the Creator himself cometh, to be manifested in the flesh; and with him comes pardon, peace, and joy; every virtue and all felicity comes in his train. Angels and archangels, let your songs be of Jesus, and teach the very heavens to echo with his adored and majestic name. Ye beheld him, with greater transports of admiration, when you at-

tended his agony in the garden, and saw him prostrate on the ground; than when you beheld universal nature rising at his call, and saw the wonders of his creating might. Tune to loftiest notes your golden harps, and waken raptures, unknown before even in heavenly breasts; while all that has breath swells the concert of harmony; and all that has being unites in the tribute of praise.

Chiefly, let man exalt his voice; let man, with distinguished hosannas, hail the Redeemer. For man, he was stretched on the racking cross; for man, he was consigned to the gloomy sepulchre; for man, he procured grace unmeasurable, and bliss inconceivable. However different, therefore, in your age, or more different in your circumstances, be unanimous, O men, in magnifying a Saviour, who is no respecter of persons; who gave himself a ransom for all. Bend, ye kings, from your thrones of ivory and gold; in your robes of imperial purple, fall prostrate at his feet; who forsook a nobler throne, and laid aside more illustrious ensigns of majesty, that you might reign with God for ever and ever. Children of poverty, meanest of mortals (if any can be called poor, who are thus enriched; if any can be accounted mean, who are thus ennobled;) rejoice, greatly rejoice, in God your Saviour, who chose to be indigent, was willing to be contemned; that you might be entitled to the treasures, and be numbered with the princes of heaven. Sons of affliction, though harassed with pain, and inured to anguish, O! change your groans into songs of gratitude; let no complaining voice, no jarring string be heard in the universal symphony; but glorify the Lamb even in the fires,* who himself

* Isai. xxiv. 15.

bore greater torment than you feel, and has promised you a share in the joy which he inherits· who has made your sufferings short, and will make your rest eternal. Men of hoary locks, bending beneath a weight of years, and tottering on the brink of the grave; let Christ be your support under all infirmities; lean upon Christ, as the rock of your salvation. Let his name, his precious name, form the last accents which quiver on your pale expiring lips. And let this be the first that lisps on your tongues, ye tender infants: remember your Redeemer in your earliest moments; devote the choicest of your hours to the learning of his will, and the chief of your strength to the glorifying of his name; who, in the perfection of health, and the very prime of manhood, was content to become a motionless and ghastly corpse; that you might be girt with the vigour, and clothed with the bloom of eternal youth.

Ye spirits of just men made perfect, who are released from the burden of the flesh, and freed from all the vexatious solicitations of corruption in yourselves, delivered from all the injurious effects of iniquity in others; who sojourn no longer in the tents of strife, or the territories of disorder; but are received into that pure, harmonious, holy society, where every one acts up to his amiable and exalted character; where God himself is pleased graciously and immediately to preside: you find, not without pleasing astonishment, your hopes improved into actual enjoyment, and your faith superseded by the beatific vision. You feel all your former shyness of behaviour happily lost in the overflowings of unbounded love; and all your little differences of opinion entirely borne down by tides of invariable truth.

Bless, therefore, with all your enlarged powers, bless his infinitely larger goodness; who, when he had overcome the sharpness of death, opened the gates of paradise, opened the kingdom of heaven to all generations, and to every denomination of the faithful.

Ye men of holy conversation and humble tempers, think of him who loved you, and washed you from your sins in his own blood; think of him on your silent couch, talk of him in every social interview; glory in his excellencies, make your boast of his obedience, and add, still continue to add, the incense of a dutiful life, to all the oblations of a grateful tongue. Weakest of believers, who go mourning under a sense of guilt, and conflicting with the ceaseless assaults of temptation; put off your sackcloth, and be girded with gladness; because Jesus is as merciful to hear, as he is mighty to help; because he is touched with the tenderest sympathizing concern for all your distresses; and he lives, ever lives, to be your advocate with the Father. Why then should uneasy doubts sadden your countenances? Why should desponding fears oppress your souls? Turn, turn those disconsolate sighs into cheerful hymns, since you have his powerful intercession, and his inestimable merits, to be your anchor in all tribulations, to be your passport into eternal blessedness.

Most of all, ye ministers of the sanctuary; heralds commissioned from above; lift, every one, his voice like a trumpet, and loudly proclaim the Redeemer: get ye up, ye ambassadors of peace, get ye up into the high mountains, and spread far and wide the honours of the Lamb, 'that was slain, but is alive for evermore.' Teach every sacred roof to resound with his fame and every human heart to glow with his

love. Declare, as far as the force of words will go, declare the inexhaustible fulness of that great atonement, whose merits are commensurate with the glories of the Divinity. Tell the sinful wretch what pity yearns in Immanuel's bowels; what blood he has spilt, what agonies he has endured, what wonders he has wrought for the salvation of his enemies. Invite the indigent to become rich; entreat the guilty to accept of pardon; because with the crucified Jesus is plenteous redemption, and all-sufficiency to save. While you, placed in conspicuous stations, pour the joyful sound; may I, as I steal through the vale of humble life, catch the pleasing accents! For me, the author of all blessings became a curse: for me, his bones were dislocated, and his flesh was torn: he hung with streaming veins, and an agonizing soul, on the cross for me. O! may I, in my little sphere, and amidst the scanty circle of my acquaintance, at least whisper these glad transporting things; whisper them from my own heart, that they may surely reach, and sweetly penetrate theirs.

But, when men and angels raise the grand hymn; when all worlds, and all beings, add their collective acclamations, this full, fervent, and universal chorus will be so inferior to the riches of the Redeemer's grace, so disproportionate to the magnificence of his glory, that it will seem but to debase the unutterable subject it attemps to exalt. The loud hallelujah will die away in the solemn mental eloquence of prostrate, rapturous, silent adoration.

> O goodness infinite! goodness immense!
> And love that passeth knowledge! Words are vain;
> Language is lost in wonders so divine.
> 'Come then, expressive silence, muse his praise.'

CONTEMPLATIONS

ON

THE NIGHT.

Night is fair virtue's immemorial friend:
The conscious moon, through ev'ry distant age,
Has held a lamp to wisdom.

Night Thoughts, N. v.

TO

PAUL ORCHARD, ESQ.

Of Stoke-Abbey, in Devonshire.

DEAR SIR,

As your honoured father was pleased to make choice of me to answer in your name at the font, and to exercise a sort of guardianship over your spiritual interests; permit me, by putting these little treatises into your hand, to fulfil some part of that solemn obligation.

Gratitude for many signal favours, and a conscientious regard to my sacred engagement, have long ago inspired my breast with the warmest wishes, both for your true dignity and real happiness. Nor can I think of a more endearing or a more effectual way of advancing either the one or the other, than to set before you a sketch of your excellent father's character. Illustrious examples are the most winning incitements to virtue; and none can come attended with such particular recommendations to you, Sir, as the pattern of that worthy person, from whom you derive your very being.

A most cordial and reverential esteem for the Divine Word, was one of his remarkable qualities. Those oracles of Heaven were his principal delight

and his inseparable companions. Your gardens, your solitary walks, and the hedges of your fields can witness with what an unwearied assiduity he exercised himself in the law of the Lord.* From hence he fetched his maxims of wisdom, and formed his judgment of things. The sacred precepts were the model of his temper and the guide of his life, while the precious promises were the joy of his heart and his portion for ever.

Improving company was another of his most relishing pleasures. Few gentlemen were better furnished either with richness of fancy, or copiousness of expression, to bear a shining part in conversation. With these talents he always endeavoured to give some useful, generally some religious turn to the discourse. Nor did he ever reflect with greater complacency on his social hours, than when they tended to glorify the Eternal Majesty, and to awaken in himself and others, a more lively spirit of devotion.

To project for the good of others was his frequent study, and to carry those benevolent contrivances into execution his favourite employ. When visited by the young persons of the neighbourhood, far from taking an ungraceful pride to initiate them in debauchery, or confirm them in a riotous habit, it was his incessant aim, by finely-adapted persuasives, to encourage them in industry, and establish them in a course of sobriety; to guard them against the allurements of vice, and animate them with the principles of piety; a noble kind of hospitality this, which will probably transmit its beneficial influence to their earthly possessions, to their future families, and even to their everlasting state.

* Josh. xxiv. 27.

A conviction of human indigence, and a thorough persuasion of the divine all-sufficiency, induced him to be frequent in prayer. To prostrate himself in profound adoration, before that infinitely exalted Being who dwells in light inaccessible, was his glory; to implore the continuance of the Almighty favour, and the increase of all Christian graces, was his gain. In those moments, no doubt, he remembered you, Sir, with a particular earnestness, and lodged many an ardent petition in the court of Heaven for his infant son. Cease not to second them with your own devout supplications, that they may descend upon your head 'in the fulness of the blessings of the gospel of peace.'

To give their genuine lustre to all his other endowments, he was careful to maintain an humble mind. Though his friends might admire his superior abilities, or his acquaintance applaud his exemplary behaviour, he saw how far he fell short of the mark of his high calling; saw, and lamented his defects; saw, and renounced himself; relying, for final acceptance and endless felicity, on a better righteousness than his own, even on the transcendently perfect righteousness, and inconceivably precious death of Jesus the Redeemer. This was the rock of his hope, and the very crown of his rejoicing.

These, Sir, are some of the distinguishing characteristics of your deceased parent. As you had the misfortune to lose so valuable a relative before you was capable of forming any acquaintance with his person, I flatter myself you will the more attentively observe his picture; this his moral picture, designed, not to be set in gold, or sparkle in enamel, but to breathe in your spirit, and to live in all your con-

duct; which, though it be entirely your own, calculated purely for yourself, may possibly (like family pieces in your parlour, that glance an eye upon as many as enter the room), make some pleasing and useful impression on every beholder. May every one, charmed with the beautiful image, catch its resemblance; and each in his respective sphere 'go and do likewise.'

But you, Sir, are peculiarly concerned to copy the amiable original. As the order of an indulgent Providence has made you heir of the affluent circumstances, let not a gay and thoughtless inadvertence cut you off from the richer inheritance of these noble qualifications. These will be your security amidst all the glittering dangers, which are inseparable from blooming years, and an elevated situation in life: these are your path, your sure and only path to true greatness and solid happiness. Tread in these steps, and you cannot fail to be the darling of your friends, and the favourite of Heaven: tread in these steps, and you will give inexpressible joy to one of the best of mothers; you will become an extensive blessing to your fellow-creatures; and which, after such most engaging motives, is scarce worthy to be mentioned, you will be the delight, the honour, and the boast of,

Dear Sir,

Your very affectionate godfather,

And most faithful humble servant,

JAMES HERVEY.

Weston-Favel, near Northampton,
July 14, 1747.

PREFACE.

We have already exercised our speculations on the Tombs and Flowers, surveying nature covered with the deepest horrors, and arrayed in the richest beauties. Allegory taught many of the objects to speak the language of virtue; while imagination lent her colouring, to give the lessons an engaging air; and this with a view of imitating that divine Instructor, who commissioned the lily,* in her silver suit, to remonstrate in the ear of unbelieving reason; who sent his disciples (men ordained to teach the universe) to learn maxims of the last importance from the most insignificant birds* that wander through the paths of the air, from the very meanest herbs* that are scattered over the face of the ground.

Emboldened by the kind of acceptance of the preceding sketches, I beg leave to confide in the same benevolence of taste for the protection and support of the two remaining Essays, which exhibit a prospect of still life and grand operation; which moralize on the most composed and most magnificent appearances of things; in which fancy is again suffered to introduce her imagery, but only as the hand-maid of truth; in order to dress her person and display her charms,

* Matt. vi. 26. 28—30

to engage the attention and win the love even of the gay and of the fashionable; which is more likely to be effected by forming agreeable pictures of nature, and deriving instructive observations, than by the laborious method of long-deduced arguments or close-connected reasonings. The contemplations of the heavens and the earth, of their admirable properties and beneficial changes, has always afforded the most exalted gratification to the human mind. In compliance with this prevailing taste, I have drawn my serious admonitions from the stupendous theatre and variegated scenery of the universe; that the reader may learn his duty from his very pleasures, may gather wisdom, mingled with virtue, from the most refined entertainments and noblest delights.

The evening, drawing her sables over the world, and gently darkening into night, is a season peculiarly proper for sedate consideration. All circumstances concur to hush our passions, and soothe our cares; to tempt our steps abroad, and prompt our thoughts to serious reflection.

> ——— Then is the time
> For those, whom wisdom and whom nature charm,
> To steal themselves from the degenerate crowd,
> And soar above this little scene of things;
> To tread low-thoughted vice beneath their feet;
> To soothe the throbbing passions into peace;
> And woo lone quiet in her silent walks.*

The favour I would solicit for the first of the following compositions, is, that it may be permitted to attend in such retired and contemplative excursions; to attend, if not under the character of a friend, at least in the humble capacity of a servant or page—as a servant, to open the door of meditation and remove

* Thomson's Autumn, l. 973.

every impediment to those best exercises of the mind, which blend advantage with amusement, and improve while they delight; as a page, to gather up the unstable, fluctuating train of fancy, and collect her fickle powers into a consistent, regular, and useful habit of thinking.

The other, conversant among the starry regions, would lead the imagination through those beautiful tracts of unclouded azure, and point out to the judgment some of those astonishing particulars which so eminently signalize the celestial worlds: a prospect this, to which curiosity attracts our eyes, and to which Scripture itself often directs our study; a prospect beyond all others most excellently calculated to enlarge the soul, and ennoble its conceptions; to give the grandest apprehensions of the everlasting God, and create sentiments of becoming superiority with relation to all transitory interest; in a word, to furnish faith with the surest foundation for a steady affiance and true magnanimity of spirit, to afford piety the strongest motives, both for a lively gratitude and profound veneration.

While Galileo lifts his tube and discovers the prodigious magnitude of those radiant orbs; while Newton measures their amazing distances, and unites the whole system in harmonious order, by the subtle influences of attraction; I would only, like the herald before that illustrious Hebrew,* proclaim at every turn, 'Bow the knee, and adore the Almighty Maker; magnify his eternal name, and make his praise, like all his works, to be glorious.'

* Gen. xli. 43.

CONTEMPLATIONS

ON

THE NIGHT.

THE business of the day dispatched, and the sultry heats abated, invited me to the recreation of a walk; a walk in one of the finest recesses of the country, and in one of the most pleasant evenings which the summer-season produced.

The limes and elms, uniting their branches over my head, formed a verdant canopy, and cast a most refreshing shade. Under my feet lay a carpet of nature's velvet, grass intermingled with moss and embroidered with flowers. Jessamines, in conjunction with woodbines, twined around the trees, displaying their artless beauties to the eye, and diffusing their delicious sweets through the air. On either side, the boughs, rounded into a set of regular arches, opened a view into the distant fields, and presented me with a prospect of the bending skies. The little birds, all joyous and grateful for the favours of the light, were paying their acknowledgments in a tribute of harmony, and soothing themselves to rest with songs; while a French-horn, from a neighbouring seat, sent its melodious accents, softened by the length of their passage, to complete the concert of the grove.

Roving in this agreeable manner, my thoughts

were exercised on a subject still more agreeable than the season or the scene: I mean our late signal victory over the united forces of intestine treason and foreign invasion; a victory which pours joy through the present age, and will transmit its influence to generations yet unborn.—Are not all the blessings, which can endear society, or render life itself desirable, centered in our present happy constitution and auspicious government? Were they not all struck at, by that impious and horrid blow, meditated at Rome, levelled by France, and seconded by factious spirits at home? Who then can be sufficiently thankful for the gracious interposition of Providence, which has not only averted the impending ruin, but turned it, with aggravated confusion, on the authors of our troubles?

Methinks, every thing valuable which I possess, every thing charming which I behold, conspire to enhance this ever-memorable event. To this it is owing that I can ramble unmolested along the vale of private life, and taste all the innocent satisfactions of a contemplative retirement. Had rebellion succeeded in her detestable designs, instead of walking with security and complacence in these flowery paths, I might have met the assassin with his dagger, or have been obliged to abandon my habitation, and 'embrace the rock for a shelter.' Farewell, then, ye fragrant shades, seats of meditation and calm repose! I should have been driven from your loved retreats, to make way for some barbarous, some insulting victor. Farewell, then, ye pleasing toils, and wholesome amusements of my rural hours; I should no more have reared the tender flower to the sun; no more have taught the espalier to expand her boughs;

nor have fetched any longer from my kitchen-garden the purest supplies of health.

Had rebellion succeeded in her detestable designs, instead of being regaled with the music of the woods, I might have been alarmed with the sound of the trumpet and all the thunder of war; instead of being entertained with this beautiful landscape, I might have beheld our houses ransacked, and our villages plundered; I might have beheld our fenced cities encompassed with armies, and our fruitful fields 'clothed with desolation;' or have been shocked with the more frightful images of 'garments rolled in blood,' and of a ruffian's blade reeking from a brother's heart: instead of peace, with her cheering olives, sheltering our abodes; instead of justice, with her impartial scale, securing our goods; persecution had brandished her sword, and slavery clanked her chains.

Nor are these miseries imaginary only, or the creatures of a groundless panic. There are, in a neighbouring kingdom, who very lately experienced them in all their rigour. And if the malignant spirit of popery had forced itself into our church; if an abjured pretender had cut his way to our throne; we could have no reason to expect a mitigation of their severity on our behalf. But supposing the tender mercies of a bigoted usurper to have been somewhat less cruel, where, alas! would have been the encouragement to cultivate our little portion; or what pleasure could arise from an improved spot, if both the one and the other lay every moment at the mercy of lawless power? This embittering circumstance would spoil their relish; and by rendering them a precarious, would render them a joyless acquisition.

In vain might the vine spread her purple clusters, in vain be lavish of her generous juices, if tyranny, like a ravenous harpy, should be always hovering over the bowl, and ready to snatch it from the lip of industry, or to wrest it from the hand of liberty.

Liberty, that dearest of names, and property, that best of charters, give an additional, an inexpressible charm to every delightful object. See, how the declining sun has beautified the western clouds, has arrayed them in crimson, and skirted them with gold; such a refinement of our domestic bliss is property; such an improvement of our public privileges is liberty. When the lamp of day shall withdraw his beams, there will still remain the same collection of floating vapours; but O! how changed, how gloomy! The carnation-streaks are faded, the golden edgings are wore away, and all the lovely tinges are lost in a leaden-coloured lowering sadness. Such would be the aspect of all these scenes of beauty, and all these abodes of pleasure, if exposed continually to the caprice of arbitrary sway, or held in a state of abject and cringing dependence.

The sun has almost finished his daily race, and hastens to the goal. He descends lower, and lower, till his chariot-wheels seem to hover on the utmost verge of the sky. What is somewhat remarkable, the orb of light upon the point of setting, grows considerably broader. The shadows of objects, just before they become blended in undistinguishable darkness, are exceedingly lengthened; like blessings, little prized while possessed, but highly esteemed the very instant they are preparing for their flight; bitterly regretted, when once they are gone, and to be seen no more.

The radiant globe is now half-immersed beneath the dusky earth; or, as the ancient poets speak, is shooting into the ocean, and sinks in the western sea. And could I view the sea at this juncture, it would yield a most amusing and curious spectacle. The rays striking horizontally on the liquid element, give it the appearance of floating glass; or, reflected in many a different direction, form a beautiful multiplicity of colours. A stranger, as he walks along the sandy beach, and lost in pensive attention, listens to the murmurings of the restless flood, is agreeably alarmed by the gay decorations of the surface. With entertainment and with wonder, he sees the curling waves, here glistering with white, there glowing with purple; in one place wearing an azure tincture, in another glancing a cast of undulating green, in the whole exhibiting a piece of fluid scenery that may vie with yonder pencil tapestries, though wrought in the loom, and tinged with the dyes of heaven.

While I am transported by fancy to the shores of the ocean, the great luminary is sunk beneath the horizon, and totally disappears. The whole face of the ground is overspread with shades, or, with what one of the finest painters of nature calls, a dun obscurity. Only a few very superior eminences are tipt with streaming silver. The tops of groves and lofty towers catch the last smiles of day,* are still irradiated by the departing beams: but, O! how transient is the distinction! how momentary the gift! Like all the blessings which mortals enjoy below, it is gone almost as soon as granted. See! how languishingly it trembles on the leafy spire, and glimmers with a dying faintness on the mountain's brow.

* Milt. Par. Lost, b. iv. 598.

The little vivacity that remains, decays every moment. It can no longer hold its station. While I speak, it expires, and resigns the world to the gradual approaches of night.

——— Now twilight gray
Has in her sober liv'ry all things clad.

Every object, a little while ago, glared with light; but now all appears under a more qualified lustre. The animals harmonize with the insensible creation; and what was gay in those, as well as glittering in this, gives place to an universal gravity. In the meadows all was jocund and sportive; but now the gamesome lambs are grown weary of their frolics, and the tired shepherd has imposed silence on his pipe. In the branches all was sprightliness and song; but now the lively green is wrapt in the descending glooms, and no tuneful airs are heard, only the plaintive stock-dove cooing mournfully through the grove. Should I now be vain and trifling, the heavens and the earth would rebuke my unseasonable levity! Therefore be these moments devoted to thoughts sedate as the closing day, solemn as the face of things. And, indeed, however my social hours are enlivened with innocent pleasantry, let every evening, in her sable habit, toll the bell to serious consideration. Nothing can be more proper for a person who walks on the borders of eternity, and is hasting continually to his final audit; nothing more proper than daily to slip away from the circle of amusements, and frequently to relinquish the hurry of business, in order to consider and adjust 'the things that belong to his peace.'

Since the sun is departed, from whence can it pro-

ceed, that I am not involved in pitchy darkness! Whence these remainders of diminished brightness, which, though scarcely forming a refulgence, soften and soothe the horrors of night? I see not the shining ruler, yet am cheered with a real, though faint, communication of his splendour. Does he remember us in his progress through other climes? Does he send a detachment of his rays to escort us during his personal absence; or to cover (if I may use the military term) our retreat from the scene of action? Has he bequeathed us a dividend of his beams, sufficient to render our circumstances easy, and our situation agreeable, till sleep pours its soft oppression on the organs of sense, till sleep suspends all the operations of our hands, and entirely supersedes any farther occasion for the light?

No; it is ill-judged and unreasonable to ascribe this beneficent conduct to the sun. Not unto him, not unto him, but unto his Almighty Maker we are obliged for this pleasing attendant, this valuable legacy. The gracious author of our being has so disposed the collection of circumambient air, as to make it productive of this fine and wonderful effect. The sunbeams, falling on the higher parts of the aërial fluid, instead of passing on in straight lines, are bent inwards and conducted on our sight. Their natural course is over-ruled, and they are bidden to wheel about on purpose to favour us with a welcome and salutary visit; by which means the blessings of light and the season of business are considerable prolonged; and, what is a very endearing circumstance, prolonged most considerably; when the vehement heats of summer incline the student to postpone his walk till the temperate evening prevails; when the impor-

tant labours of the harvest call the husbandman abroad before the day is fully risen.

After all the ardours of the sultry day, how reviving is this coolness! This gives new verdure to the fading plants, new vivacity to the withering flowers, and a more exquisite fragrance to their mingled scents: by this, the air also receives a new force, and is qualified to exert itself with greater activity —qualified to brace our limbs, to heave our lungs, and co-operate with a brisker impulse in perpetuating the circulation of our blood. This I might call the grand alembic of nature, which distils her most sovereign cordial, the refreshing dews. Incessant heat would rob us of their beneficial agency, and oblige them to evaporate in imperceptible exhalations. Turbulent winds, or even the gentler motions of Aurora's fan, would dissipate the rising vapours, and not suffer them to form a coalition. But, favoured by the stillness, and condensed by the coolness of the night, they unite in pearly drops, and create that finely-tempered humidity which cheers the vegetable world, as sleep exhilarates the animal.

Not unlike to these are the advantages of solitude. The world is a troubled ocean, and who can erect stable purposes on its fluctuating waves? The world is a school of wrong; and who does not feel himself warping to its pernicious influences? On this sea of glass,* how insensibly we slide from our own stedfastness! Some sacred truth, which was struck in lively characters on our souls, is obscured, if not obliterated; some worthy resolution, which heaven had wrought in our breasts, is shaken, if not overthrown; some enticing vanity which we had solemnly

* Rev. xv. 2.

renounced, again practises its wiles, and again captivates our affections. How often has an unwary glance kindled a fever of irregular desire in our hearts! How often has a word of applause dropt luscious poison into our ears; or some disrespectful expression raised a gust of passion in our bosoms! Our innocence is of so tender a constitution that it suffers in the promiscuous crowd. Our purity is of so delicate a complexion, that it scarce touches on the world without contracting a stain. We see, we hear, with peril.

But here safety dwells, every meddling and intrusive avocation is secluded; silence holds the door against the strife of tongues, and all the impertinences of idle conversation. The busy swarm of vain images and cajoling temptations which beset us with a buzzing importunity amidst the gaieties of life, are chased by these thickening shades. Here I may, without disturbance, commune with my own heart; and learn that best of sciences, to know myself. Here the soul may rally her dissipated powers, and grace recover its native energy. This is the opportunity to rectify every evil impression; to expel the poison, and guard against the contagion of corrupting examples. This is the place, where I may with advantage apply myself to subdue the rebel within; and be master, not of a sceptre, but of myself. Throng then, ye ambitious, the levees of the powerful; I will be punctual in my assignations with solitude. To a a mind intent upon its own improvement, solitude has charms incomparably more engaging than the entertainments presented in the theatre, or the honours conferred in the drawing-room.

I said solitude.—Am I then alone?—'Tis true, my

acquaintance are at a distance. I have stole away from company, and am remote from all human observation. But is that an alarming thought?

> Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
> Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep.*

Perhaps, there may be numbers of those invisible beings patrolling this same retreat, and joining with me in contemplating the Creator's works; perhaps those ministering spirits, who rejoice at the conversion of a sinner, and hold up the goings of the righteous, may follow us to the lonely recess; and even in our most solitary moments be our constant attendants. What a pleasing awe is awakened by such a reflection! How venerable it renders my retired walks! I am struck with reverence, as under the roof of some sacred edifice, or in the presence-chamber of some mighty monarch. O! may I never bring any pride of imagination, nor indulge the least dissolute affection, where such refined and exalted intelligences exercise their watch!

'Tis possible, that I am encompassed with such a cloud of witnesses; but it is certain that God, the infinite eternal God, is now and ever with me. The great Jehovah, before whom all the angelic armies bow their heads, and veil their faces, surrounds me, supports me, pervades me. 'In him I live, move, and have my being.' The whole world is his august temple; and, in the most sequestered corner, I appear before his adorable Majesty, no less than when I worship in his house, or kneel at his altar. In every place, therefore, let me pay him the homage of a heart cleansed from idols, and devoted to his service. In every circumstance let me feel no ambition, but

* Milt. Par. Lost, b. iv. 677.

to please him: nor covet any happiness, but to enjoy him.

How sublime is the description, and how striking the sentiment, in that noble passage of the Psalms! Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I climb up into the heights of heaven, thou art there enthroned in light: if I go down to the depths of the grave, thou art there also in thy pavilion of darkness. If I retire to the remotest eastern climes, where the morning first takes wing; if, swifter than the darting ray, I pass to the opposite regions of the west, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea:* shall I, in that distant situation, be beyond thy reach; or, by this sudden transition, escape thy notice? So far from it, that could I, with one glance of thought, transport myself beyond all the bounds of creation, I should still be enclosed in the hollow of thy hand. Awful, yet delightful truth! Let it be interwoven with every thought, and become one with the very consciousness of my existence; that I may continually walk with God, and conduct myself, in every step of my behaviour, 'as seeing him that is invisible.'

They are the happy persons; felicity, true felicity, is all their own, who live under an habitual sense of God's omnipresence, and a sweet persuasion of his special love. If dangers threaten, their impregnable defence is at hand. Nothing can be so near to terrify, as their almighty Guardian to secure them. To these the hours can never be tedious, and it is impossible for them to be alone. Do they step aside from the occupations of animal life? A more exalted set of employments engage their attention. They ad-

* Psal. cxxxix. 7—9.

dress themselves, in all the various acts of devotion, to their heavenly Father, who now sees in secret, and will hereafter reward them openly: they spread all their wants before his indulgent eye, and disburden all their sorrows into his compassionate bosom. Do they withdraw from human society? They find themselves under the more immediate regards of their Maker. If they resign the satisfactions of social intercourse, it is to cultivate a correspondence with the condescending Deity, and taste the pleasures of divine friendship. What is such a state, but the very suburbs of heaven? What is such a conduct but an antepast of eternal blessedness?

Now, my soul, the day is ended. The hours are all fled: they are fled to the supreme Judge, and have given in their evidence; an evidence registered in heaven, and to be produced at the great audit. Happy they, whose improvement has kept pace with the fleeting minutes; who have seized the important fugitives, and engaged them in the pursuit of wisdom, or devoted them to the service of virtue.

Fugitives indeed they are. Our moments slip away silently and insensibly: the thief steals not more unperceived from the pillaged house. And will the runagates never stop? No; wherever we are, however employed, time pursues his incessant course. Though we are listless and dilatory, the great measurer of our days presses on; still presses on in his unwearied career, and whirls our weeks, and months, and years away. Is it not then surprisingly strange, to hear people complain of the tediousness of their time, and how heavy it hangs upon their hands? to see them contrive a variety of amusing artifices to accelerate its flight, and get rid of its burden? Ah!

thoughtless mortals! Why need you urge the headlong torrent? Your days are swifter than a post, which, carrying dispatches of the last importance, with unremitted speed scours the road. They pass away like the nimble ships, which have the wind in their wings, and skim along the watery plain. They hasten to their destined period with the rapidity of an eagle, which leaves the stormy blast behind her, while she cleaves the air, and darts upon her prey.*

Now the day is gone, how short it appears! When my fond eye beheld it in perspective, it seemed a very considerable space. Minutes, crowded upon minutes; and hours, ranged behind hours; exhibited an extensive draught, and flattered me with a long progression of pleasures; but, upon a retrospective view, how wonderfuliy is the scene altered! The landscape, large and spacious, which a warm fancy drew, brought to the test of cool experience, shrinks into a span: just as the shores vanish and mountains dwindle to a spot, when the sailor, surrounded by skies and ocean, throws his last look on his native land. How clearly do I now discover the cheat! May it never impose upon my unwary imagination again! I find, there is nothing abiding on this side eternity. A long duration, in a state of finite existence, is mere illusion.

Perhaps the healthy and the gay may not readily credit the serious truth; especially from a young pen, and new to its employ. Let us then refer ourselves to the decision of the ancient. Ask some venerable old person, who is just marching off the mortal stage, How many have been the days of the years of thy life? It was a monarch's question; and

* Job ix. 26.

therefore can want no recommendation to the fashionable world. Observe how he shakes his hoary locks, and from a deep-felt conviction replies, 'Four-score years have finished their rounds, to furrow these cheeks, and clothe this head in snow. Such a term may seem long and large to inconsiderate youth. But O! how short, how scanty, to one that has made the experiment! short, as a gleam of transient sunshine; scanty, as the shadow that departeth. Methinks it was but yesterday, that I exchanged my childish sports for manly exercises; and now I am resigning them both for the sleep of death. As soon as we are born, we begin to draw to our end; and how small is the interval between the cradle and the tomb!' O! may we believe this testimony of mature age! May every evening bring it with clearer evidence to our minds! And may we form such an estimate of the little pittance, while it is upon the advancing hand, as we shall certainly make, when the sands are all run down?

Let me add one reflection on the work to be done, while this shuttle is flying through the loom;* a work of no small difficulty, yet of the utmost consequence? Hast thou not seen, hast thou not known, the excellent of the earth; who were living images of their Maker? His divine likeness was transfused into their hearts, and beamed forth in all their conduct; beamed forth in meekness of wisdom, and purity of affection; in all the tender offices of love, and all the nobler efforts of zeal. To be stamped with the same beautiful signature, and to be followers of them as they were of Christ; this, this is thy business. On the accomplishment of this, thy

* My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Job vii. 6.

eternal all depends. And will an affair of such unspeakable weight admit of a moment's delay, or consist with the least remissness? especially, since much of thy appointed time is already elapsed, and the remainder is all uncertainty, save only that it is in the very act to fly. Or suppose thou hadst made a covenant with the grave, and wast assured of reaching the age of Methuselah; how soon would even such a lease expire! Extend it, if you please, still farther; and let it be co-existent with nature itself. How inconsiderable is the addition? For yet a very little while, and the commissioned archangel lifts up his hand to heaven, and swears by the Almighty name, that time shall be no longer.* Then, abused opportunities will never return; and new opportunities will never more be offered. Then, should negligent mortals wish—wish ever so passionately—for a few hours—a few moments only—to be thrown back from the opening eternity; thousands of worlds would not be able to procure the grant.

Shall I now be industrious to shorten, what is no longer than a span; or to quicken the pace of what is ever on the wing? Shall I squander away what is unutterably important, while it lasts; and when once departed, is altogether irrevocable? O! my soul forbear the folly, forbear the desperate extravagance. Wilt thou chide, as a loiterer, the arrow that boundeth from the string; or sweep away diamonds, as the refuse of thy house? Throw time away? Astonishing, ruinous, irreparable profuseness! Throw empires away, and be blameless. But O! be parsimonious of thy days; husband thy precious hours. They go connected, indissolubly connected, with heaven or

* This alludes to the beginning of Revelations the xth.

hell.* Improved, they are a sure pledge of everlasting glory; wasted, they are a sad preface to never-ending confusion and anguish.

What a profound silence has composed the world? So profound is the silence, that my very breath seems a noise; the ticking of my watch is distinctly heard; if I do but stir, it creates a disturbance. There is, now, none of that confused din, from the tumultuous city; no voice of jovial rustics from the neighbouring meadow; no chirping melody from the shaded thicket. Every lip is sealed; not the least whisper invades the air, nor the least motion rustles among the boughs. Echo herself sleeps unmolested. The expanded ear, though all attention, catches no sound, but the liquid lapse of a distant murmuring stream.

All things are hush'd, as nature's self lay dead.

If, in the midst of this deep and universal composure, ten thousand bellowing thunders should burst over my head, and rend the skies with their united volleys; how should I bear so unexpected a shock? It would stun my senses, and confound my thoughts; I should shudder in every limb; perhaps sink to the earth with terror. Consider, then, O mortals! consider the much more prodigious and amazing call,

* I remember to have seen upon a sun-dial in a physician's garden at Northampton, the following inscription; which, I think, is the most proper motto for the instrument that measures our time; and the most striking admonition that can possibly be represented to every eye:

Ab hoc momento pendet aternitas.

The weighty sense of which, I know not how to express in English, more happily than in those words of Dr. Watts;

Good God! on what a slender thread
[Or, on what a moment of time]
Hang everlasting things!

which will, ere long, alarm your sleeping bones. When the tenants of the tomb have slumbered, in the most undisturbed repose, for a multitude of ages; what an inconceivable consternation must the shout of the archangel, and the trump of God, occasion! Will it not wound the ear of the ungodly; and affright, even to distraction, the impenitent sinner? The stupendous peal will sound through the vast of heaven; will shake the foundations of nature; and pierce even the deepest recesses of the grave. And how—O! how will the prisoners of divine justice be able to endure that tremendous summons to a far more tremendous tribunal! Do thou, my soul, listen to the still voice of the gospel; attend, in this thy day, to the gracious invitations of thy Saviour. Then shall that great midnight cry lose its horror, and be music in thy ears: it shall be welcome to thy reviving clay, as the tidings of liberty to the dungeon captive; as the year of jubilee to the harassed slave. This, this shall be its charming import; 'Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust.' *

What a general cessation of affairs has this dusky hour introduced! A little while ago, all was hurry, hurry. Life and activity exerted themselves in a thousand busy forms. The city swarmed with passing and repassing multitudes; all the country was sweat and dust; the air floated in perpetual agitation, by the flitting birds, and humming bees; art sat prying with her piercing eyes; while industry plied her restless hands. But see, how all this fervent and impetuous bustle is fled with the setting sun. The beasts are slunk to their grassy couch, and the winged people are retired to their downy nests; the hammer

* Isai xxvi. 19.

has resigned its sounding task, and the file ceases to repeat its flying touches: shut is the well-frequented shop, and its threshold no longer worn by the feet of numerous customers. The village swain lies drowned in slumbers; and even his trusty dog, who for a considerable time stood sentry at the door, is extended at his ease, and snores with his master. In every place toil reclines her head, and application folds her arms. All interests seem to be forgot; all pursuits are suspended; all employment is sunk away; sunk away with those fluttering myriads, which lately sported in the sun's departing rays. It is like the sabbath of universal nature; or as though the pulse of life stood still.

Thus will it be with our infinitely momentous concerns, when once the shadows of the evening (that long evening, which follows the footsteps of death!) are stretched over us. The dead cannot seek unto God; the living, the living alone, are possessed of this inestimable opportunity.* 'There is no work or device, no repentance or amendment in the grave,† whither we are all hasting.' When once that closing scene is advanced, we shall have no other part to act on this earthly theatre. Then the sluggard, who has slumbered away life in a criminal inactivity, must lie down in hopeless distress, and everlasting sorrow. Then, that awful doom will take place, 'He that is holy, let him be holy still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy for ever.'

* Behold! now is the accepted time. Behold! now is the day of salvation. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

Haste, haste, he lies in wait, he's at the door,
Insidious death! Should his strong hand arrest,
No composition sets the pris'ner free.

† Isai. xxxviii. 11.

Is it so my soul? Is this the only, only time allotted for obtaining the great reward, and making thy salvation sure? and art thou lulled in a vain security, or dreaming in a supine inadvertency? Start, O! start from thy trance; gird up the loins of thy mind, and work while it is day; improve the present seed-time, that eternity may yield a joyful harvest. We especially, who are watchmen in Israel, and ministers of the glorious gospel; may we be awakened by this consideration to all assiduity in our holy office. Some or other of our people are ever and anon departing into the invisible state; all our friends are making incessant approaches to their long home; and we ourselves shall very shortly be transmitted to the confinement of the tomb. This is the favourable juncture, wherein alone we can contribute to their endless welfare; this is the crisis, the all-important crisis, of their final felicity. Instantly, therefore, let us pour in our wholesome instructions; instantly, let us ply them with our earnest exhortations. A moment's delay may be an irreparable loss; may be irretrievable ruin. While we procrastinate, a fatal stroke may intervene, and place us beyond the power of administering, or place them beyond all possibility of receiving any spiritual good.*

How frequently is the face of nature changed! and, by changing, made more agreeable! The long continued glitter of the day, renders the soothing shades of the evening doubly welcome; nor does the morn ever purple the east with so engaging a lustre, as after the gloom of a dark and dismal night. At present a calm of tranquillity is spread through the universe. The weary winds have forgot to blow; the

* 1 Kings xx. 40.

gentle gales have fanned themselves asleep; not so much as a single leaf nods; even the quivering aspin rests; and not one breath curls o'er the stream. Sometimes, on the contrary, the tempest summons all the forces of the air, and pours itself with resistless fury from the angry north. The whole atmosphere is tossed into tumultuous confusion, and the watery world is heaved to the clouds. The astonished mariner and his straining vessel, now scale the rolling mountain, and hang dreadfully visible on the broken surge: now shoot, with headlong impetuosity, into the yawning gulph; and neither hulk nor mast is seen. The storm sweeps over the continent, raves along the city streets, struggles through the forest-boughs, and terrifies the savage nations with a howl more wildly horrid than their own. The knotty oaks bend before the blast, their iron trunks groan, and their stubborn limbs are dashed to the ground; the lofty dome rocks, and even the solid tower totters on its basis.

Such variations are kindly contrived, and with an evident condescension to the fickleness of our taste; because a perpetual repetition of the same objects would create satiety and disgust: therefore the indulgent Father of our race has diversified the universal scene, and bid every appearance bring with it the charm of novelty. This circumstance is beneficial as well as entertaining. Providence, ever gracious to mortals, ever intent on promoting our felicity, has taken care to mingle in the constitution of things what is pleasing to our imagination, with what is serviceable to our interests. The piercing winds and rugged aspects of winter, render the balmy gales and flowery scenes of spring peculiarly delightful. At the

same time the keen frosts mellow the soil and prepare it for the hand of industry; the rushing rains impregnate the glebe, and fit it to become a magazine of plenty. The earth is a great laboratory! and December's cold collects the gross materials, which are sublimated by the refining warmth of May. The air is a pure elastic fluid; and were it always to remain in this motionless serenity, it would lose much of its active spring: were it never agitated by those wholesome concussions, it would contract a noisome, perhaps, pestilential taint; in which cases, our respiration, instead of purifying, would corrupt the vital juices; instead of supplying us with refreshment, would be a source of diseases; or every gasp we draw might be unavoidable death. How then should we admire, how should we adore, that happy union of benignity and wisdom, which, from a variety of dispensations, produces an uniformity of good; produces a perpetual succession of delights, and an uninterrupted series of advantages?

The darkness is now at its height, and I cannot but admire the obliging manner of its taking place. It comes not with a blunt and abrupt incivility, but makes gentle and respectful advances. A precipitate transition from the splendours of day to all the horrors of midnight, would be inconvenient and frightful! it would bewilder the traveller in his journey, it would strike the creation with amazement, and, perhaps, be pernicious to the organs of sight. Therefore the gloom rushes not upon us instantaneously, but increases by slow degrees; and, sending twilight before as its harbinger, decently advertises us of its approach. By this means we are neither alarmed nor incommoded by the change; but are able to take all

suitable and timely measures for its reception. Thus graciously has Providence regulated, not only the grand vicissitudes of the seasons, but also the common interchanges of light and darkness, with an apparent reference to our comfort.

Now the fierce inhabitants of the forest forsake their dens. A thousand grim forms, a thousand growling monsters, pace the desert. Death is in their jaws, while, stung with hunger and athirst for blood, they roam their nightly rounds. Unfortunate the traveller who is overtaken by the night in those dismal wilds! How must he stand aghast at the mingled yell of ravenous throats, the lions roaring after their prey! Defend him, propitious Heaven! or else he must see his endearing spouse, and hail his native home, no more! Now the prowling wolf, like a murderous ruffian, dogs the shepherd's footsteps, and besets his bleating charge. The fox, like a crafty felon, steals to the thatched cottage, and carries off the feathered booty.

Happy for the world, were these the only destroyers that walk in darkness. But, alas! there are savages in human shape; who, muffled in shades, infest the abodes of civilized life. The sons of violence make choice of this season to perpetrate the most outrageous acts of wrong and robbery.* The adulterer waiteth for the twilight; and, baser than the villain on the highway, betrays the honour of his bosom-friend. Now faction forms her close cabals, and whispers her traitorous insinuations. Now rebellion plans her accursed plots, and prepares the train to

* ———— When night
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.—*Milt.*

blow a nation into ruin. Now crimes, which hide their odious heads in the day, haunt the seats of society, and stalk through the gloom with audacious front. Now the vermin of the stews crawl from their lurking holes to wallow in sin, and spread contagion through the night; each soothing himself with the fond notion, that all is safe, that no eye sees.

Are they then concealed? Preposterous madmen! to draw the curtain between their infamous practices and a little set of mortals, but lay them open to all these chaste and wakeful eyes of heaven. As though the moon and stars were made, to light men to their revels, and not to God. Are they then concealed? No, truly. Were every one of these vigilant luminaries closed; an eye keener than the lightning's flash, an eye brighter than ten thousand suns, beholds their every motion. Their thickest shades are beaming day* to the jealous Inspector and supreme Judge of human actions. Deluded creatures! have ye not heard, have ye not read, 'that clouds and darkness are his majestic residence?'† In that very gloom to which you fly for covert, he erects his throne. What you reckon your screen is the bar of his tribunal. O! remember this! Stand in awe, and sin not. Remember, that the great and terrible God is about your path,‡ when you take your midnight range; is about your bed, when you indulge the loose desire; and spies out all your ways, be they ever so secretly conducted, or artfully disguised.

* This is finely and very forcibly expressed by the psalmist: 'If I say, peradventure the darkness shall cover me; then shall my night be turned to day.' Or, as it may be rendered somewhat more emphatically, 'Even the night shall be broad daylight to all around me.' Psal. cxxxix. 10.

† Psal. xcvii. 2. ‡ Psal. cxxxix. 2.

Some minutes ago, a passenger crossed along the road. His horse's foot struck the ground, and fetched fire from a flint. My eye, though at a distance, catched the view, and saw, with great clearness, the transient sparkles; of which, had I been ever so near, I should not have discerned the least glimpse under the blaze of day. So, when sickness has drawn a veil over the gaiety of our hearts; when misfortunes have eclipsed the splendour of our outward circumstances; how many important convictions present themselves with the brightest evidence! Under the sunshine of prosperity they lay undiscovered; but, when some intervening cloud has darkened the scene, they emerge from their obscurity, and even glitter upon our minds. Then, the world, that delusive cheat, confesses her emptiness; but Jesus, the bright and morning star, beams forth with inimitable lustre. Then vice loses all her fallacious allurements; that painted strumpet is horrible as the hags of hell: but virtue, despised virtue, gains loveliness from a lowering Providence, and treads the shades with more than mortal charms. May this reconcile me, and all the sons of sorrow, to our appointed share of suffering! If tribulation tend to dissipate the inward darkness, and pour heavenly day upon our minds; welcome distress; welcome disappointment; welcome whatever our froward flesh or peevish passion, would miscal calamities. These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall sit easy upon our spirits; since they befriend our knowledge, promote our faith, and so 'work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.'*

How has this darkness snatched every splendid and

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

graceful object from my sight! It has dashed the sponge over the pictures of spring, and destroyed all the delicate distinctions of things. Where are now the fine things, which so lately charmed me from the glowing parterre? The blush is struck out from the cheeks of the lovely rose, and the snowy hue is dropt from the lily. I cast my eyes toward a magnificent seat, but the aspiring columns and fair expanded front are mingled in rude confusion. Without the sun, all the elegance of the blooming world is a mere blank, all the symmetry of architecture is a shapeless heap.

Is not this an expressive emblem of the loveliness which the Son of Righteousness transfuses into all that is amiable? Were it not for Jesus and his merits, I should sigh with anguish of spirit, even while I roam through ranks of the most beautiful flowers, or breathe amidst a wilderness of sweets. Were it not for Jesus and his merits, I should roam like some disconsolate spectre, even through the smiles of creation and the caresses of fortune. My conversation in this world, though dressed in the most engaging forms of external pleasure, would be like the passage of a condemned malefactor through enamelled meadows and bowers of bliss, to be broke upon the wheel, or to expire on the rack. But a daily reflection on the Lamb's atoning blood; a comfortable trust that my soul is reconciled through this divine expiation; this is the ray, the golden ray, which irradiates the face of the universe. This is the oil of beauty, which make all things wear a cheerful aspect; and the oil of gladness, which disposes the spectator to behold them with delight. This is the secret charm which teacheth

nature, in all her prospects and all her productions, so exquisitely to please.

'Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour, till the evening.' But then his strength fails, his spirits flag, and he stands in need, not only of some respite from toil, but of some kindly and sovereign refreshments. What an admirable provision for this purpose is sleep! Sleep introduces a most welcome vacation both for the soul and body The exercises of the brain, and the labours of the hand are at once discontinued; so that the weary limbs repair their exhausted vigour, while the pensive thoughts drop their load of sorrows, and the busy ones rest from the fatigues of application. Most reviving cordial! equally beneficial to our animal and intellectual powers. It supplies the fleshy machine, and keeps all its nice movements in a proper posture for easy play. It animates the thinking faculties with fresh alacrity, and rekindles their ardour for the studies of the dawn. Without these enlivening recruits, how soon would the most robust constitution be wasted into a walking skeleton, and the most learned sage degenerate into a hoary idiot! Some time ago I beheld with surprise poor Florio. His air was wild, his countenance meagre, his thoughts roving, and speech disconcerted. Inquiring the cause of this strange alteration, I was informed, that for several nights he had not closed his eyes in sleep. For want of which noble restorative, that sprightly youth (who was once the life of the discourse, and the darling of the company,) is become a spectacle of misery and horror.

How many of my fellow-creatures are, at this very instant, confined to the bed of languishing, and com-

plaining with that illustrious sufferer of old,* 'Wearisome nights are appointed to me!' Instead of indulging soft repose, they are counting the tedious hours, telling every striking clock, or measuring the very moments by their throbbing pulse. How many, harassed with pain, most passionately long to make some little truce with their agonies in peaceful slumbers! How many, sick with disquietude, and restless even on their downy pillows, would purchase this transient oblivion of their woes, almost at any rate! That which wealth cannot procure, which multitudes sigh for in vain, thy God has bestowed on thee times out of number. The welcome visitant, punctual at the needed hour, has entered thy chamber, and poured his poppies round thy couch; has gently closed thy eye-lids, and shed his slumberous dews over all thy senses.

Since sleep is so absolutely necessary, so inestimably valuable, observe what a fine apparatus Almighty goodness has made, to accommodate us with the balmy blessing. With how kind a precaution he removes whatever might obstruct its access, or impede its influence! He draws around us the curtain of darkness, which inclines us to a drowsy indolence, and conceals every object that might too strongly agitate the sense. He conveys peace into our apartments, and imposes silence on the whole creation. Every animal is bidden to tread softly, or rather to cease from its motion, when man is retiring to his repose. May we not discern, in this gracious disposition of things, the tender cares of a nursing mother, who hushes every noise, and secludes every disturbance, when she has laid the child of her love to rest? So

* Job. vii. 3.

by such soothing circumstances and gently-working opiates, he giveth to his beloved sleep.*

Another signal instance of a Providence intent upon our welfare, is, that we are preserved safe in the hours of slumber. How are we then lost to all apprehension of danger, even though the murderer be at our bed-side, or his naked sword at our breast! Destitute of all concerns for ourselves, we are unable to think of, much more to provide for, our own security. At these moments, therefore, we lie open to innumerable perils; perils, from the resistless rage of flames: perils, from the insidious artifices of thieves, or the outrageous violence of robbers: perils from the irregular workings of our own thoughts,† and especially from the incursions of our spiritual enemy.

* Psal. c. cxxvii. 2.

† I think, it is referable only to superintending and watchful Providence, that we are not hurried into the most pernicious actions, when our imagination is heated, and our reason stupified by dreams. We have sometimes heard of unfortunate persons, who, walking in their sleep, have thrown themselves headlong from a window, and been dashed to death on the pebbles. And whence is it that such disastrous accidents are only related as pieces of news, not experienced by ourselves or our families? Were our minds more sober in their operations, or more circumspect in their regards? No, verily; nothing could be more wild than their excursions, and none could be more inattentive to their own welfare. Therefore, if we have laid us down, and slept in peace, it was because the Lord vouchsafed us the sweet refreshment; if we arose again in safety, it was because the Lord sustained us with his unremitted protection.

Will the candid reader excuse me, if I add a short story, or rather a matter of fact, suitable to the preceding remark? Two persons, who had been hunting together in the day, slept together the following night. One of them was renewing the pursuit in his dream; and having run the whole circle of the chase, came at last to the fall of the stag. Upon this, he cried out, with a determined ardour, 'I'll kill him, I'll kill him;' and immediately feels for the knife which he carried in his pocket. His companion happening to awake, and observing what passed, leaped from the bed. Being secure from danger, and the

What dreadful mischief might that restless, that implacable adversary of mankind work, was there not an invisible hand to control his rage, and protect poor mortals! what scenes of horror might he represent to our imaginations, and 'scare us with dreams, or terrify us with visions!' But the Keeper of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps, interposes in our behalf, at once to cherish us under his wings, and to defend us with his shield. It is said of Solomon, 'that threescore valiant men were about his bed, all expert in war, every one with his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night.'* But one greater than Solomon, one mightier than myriads of armed hosts, even the great Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength, he vouchsafes to encamp about our houses, to watch over our sleeping minutes, and to stop all the avenues of ill. O! the unwearied and condescending goodness of our Creator! who lulls us to our rest, by bringing on the silent shades; and plants his own ever-watchful eye as our sentinel, while we enjoy the needful repose.

Reason now resigns her sedate office, and fancy, extravagant fancy, leads the mind through a maze of vanity. The head is crowded with false images, and tantalized with the most ridiculous misapprehensions of things. Some are expatiating amidst fairy fields, and gathering garlands of visionary bliss, while their bodies are stretched on a wisp of straw, and sheltered

moon shining into the room, he stood to view the event; when, to his inexpressible surprise, the infatuated sportsman gave several deadly stabs, in the very place, where a moment before, the throat and the life of his friend lay. This I mention, as a proof that nothing hinders us, even from being assassins of others, or murderers of ourselves, amidst the mad sallies of sleep, only the preventing care of our heavenly Father.

* Cant. iii. 7. 8.

by the cobwebs of a barn. Others, quite insensible of their rooms of state, are mourning in a doleful dungeon, or struggling with raging billows. Perhaps, with hasty steps, they climb the craggy cliff, and with real anxiety fly from the imaginary danger. Or else, benumbed with sudden fear, and finding themselves unable to escape, they give up at once their hopes and their efforts; and, though reclined on a couch of ivory, are sinking, all helpless and distressed, in the furious whirlpool. So accountable are the vagaries of the brain, while sleep maintains its dominion over the limbs!

But is this the only season, when absurd and incoherent irregularities play their magic on our minds? Are there not those who dream, even in their waking moments? Some pride themselves in a notion of superior excellency, because the royal favour has annexed a few splendid titles to their names, or because the dying silkworm has bequeathed her finest threads to cover their nakedness. Others congratulate their own signal happiness, because loads of the golden lumber are amassed together in their coffers; or promise themselves a most superlative felicity indeed, when some thousands more are added to the useless heap. Nor are there wanting others, who gape after substantial satisfactisn from airy applause, and flatter themselves with, I know not what, immortality in the momentary buz of renown. Are any of these a whit more reasonable in their opinions, than the poor ragged wretch in his reveries; who, while snoring under a hedge, exults in the possession of his stately palace and sumptuous furniture? If persons, who are very vassals of their own domineering passions, and led captive by numberless temptations; if these per-

sons pique themselves with a conceit of their liberty, and fancy themselves the generous and gallant spirits of the age; where is the difference between theirs and the madman's frenzy; who, though chained to the floor, is thronged in thought, and wielding an imaginary sceptre? In a word, as many as borrow their dignity from a plume of feathers, or the gaudy trappings of fortune; as many as send their souls to seek for bliss in the blandishments of sense, or in any thing short of the divine favour, and a well-grounded hope of the incorruptible inheritance;* what are they, but dreamers with their eyes open; delirious, though in health?

Would you see their picture, drawn to the very life, and the success of their schemes calculated with the utmost exactness, cast your eye upon that fine representation exhibited by the prophet: 'It shall be even as when a hungry man dreameth, and behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or, as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite.'† Such is the race, and such the prize of all those candidates for honour and joy, who run wide from the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. They live in vanity, and die in woe. Awaken us, merciful Lord, from those noontide trances! Awaken us, while conviction may turn to our advantage, and not serve only to increase our torment. O! let our 'eyes be enlightened, to discern the things that are excellent;' and no longer be imposed upon by fantastic appearances, which, however

* These give a sacred and homefelt delight,
A sober certainty of waking bliss.—*Milt. Com.*

† Isa. xxix. 8.

pompous they may seem, will prove more empty than the visions of the night, more transient than the dream that is forgotten.

Having mentioned sleep and dreams, let me once again consider those remarkable incidents of our frame; so very remarkable, that I may venture to call them a kind of experimental mystery, and little less than a standing miracle. Behold the most vigorous constitution, when stretched on the bed of ease, and totally resigned to the slumbers of the night: its activity is oppressed with fetters of indolence; its strength is consigned over to a temporary annihilation; the nerves are like a bow unstrung, and the whole animal system is like a motionless log. Behold a person of the most delicate sensations and amiable dispositions; his eyes, though thrown wide open, admit not the visual ray; at least, distinguish not objects; his ears, with the organs unimpaired, and articulate accents beating upon the drum, perceive not the sound; at least, apprehend not the meaning: the senses, and their exquisitely fine feelings, are overwhelmed with an unaccountable stupefaction. You call him a social creature; but where are his social affections? He knows not the father that begat him; and takes no notice of the friend that is as his own soul. The wife of his bosom may expire by his side, and he lie no more concerned than a barbarian. The children of his body may be tortured with the severest pangs, and he, even in the same chamber, remain untouched with the least commiseration. Behold the most ingenious scholar, whose judgment is piercing, and able to trace the most intricate difficulties of science; his taste refined, and quick to relish all the beauties of sentiment and

composition: yet at this juncture the thinking faculties are unhinged, and the intellectual economy quite disconcerted. Instead of close-connected reasonings, nothing but a disjointed huddle of absurd ideas; instead of well-digested principles, nothing but a disorderly jumble of crude conceptions. The most palpable delusions impose upon his imagination. The whole night passes, and he frequently mistakes it for a single minute; is not sensible of the transition, hardly sensible of any duration.

Yet no sooner does the morning dawn, and daylight enter the room, but this strange enchantment vanishes. The man awakes, and finds himself possessed of all the valuable endowments, which for several hours were suspended or lost. His sinews are braced and fit for action: his senses are alert and keen. The romantic visionary brightens into the master of reason. The frozen or benumbed affections melt with tenderness, and glow with benevolence: and, what is beyond measure surprising, the intoxicated mind works itself sober, not by slow degrees, but in the twinkling of an eye recovers from its perturbation. Why does not the stupor which deadens all the nice operations of the animal powers, hold fast its possession? When the thoughts are once disadjusted, why are they not always in confusion? How is it, that they are rallied in a moment; and, from the wildest irregularity, reduced to the most orderly array? From an inactivity resembling death, how is the body so suddenly restored to vigour and agility? From extravagances bordering upon madness, how is the understanding instantaneously re-established in sedateness and harmony? Surely 'this is the Lord's doing, and it should be marvellous

in our eyes;' should awaken our gratitude and inspirit our praise.

This is the time in which ghosts are supposed to make their appearance. Now the timorous imagination teems with phantoms, and creates numberless terrors to itself. Now dreary forms in sullen state, stalk along the gloom; or, swifter than lightning, glide across the shades. Now voices more than mortal are heard from the echoing vaults, and groans issue from the hollow tombs. Now melancholy spectres visit the ruins of ancient monasteries, and frequent the solitary dwellings of the dead. They pass and repass, in unsubstantial images, along the forsaken galleries; or take their determined stand over some lamented grave. How often has the school-boy fetched a long circuit, and trudged many a needless steep, in order to avoid the haunted church-yard! Or if necessity, sad necessity, has obliged him to cross the spot where human skulls are lodged below, and the baneful yews shed supernumerary horrors above, a thousand hideous stories rush into his memory. Fear adds wings to his feet; he scarce touches the ground, dares not once look behind him, and blesses his good fortune, if no frightful sound purred at his heels, if no ghastly shape bolted upon his sight.

'Tis strange to observe the excessive timidity which possesses many people's minds on this fanciful occasion; while they are void of all concern on others of the most tremendous import. Those who are startled, in any dark and lonely walk, at the very apprehension of a single spectre, are nevertheless unimpressed at the sure prospect of entering into a whole world of disembodied beings: nay, are without any emotions of awe, though they know themselves to be

hastening into the presence of the Great, Infinite, and Eternal Spirit. Should some pale messenger from the regions of the dead draw back our curtains at the hour of midnight, and, appointing some particular place, say, as the horrid apparition to Brutus, 'I'll meet thee there:'* I believe, the boldest heart would feel something like a panic, would seriously think upon the adventure, and be in pain for the event. But when a voice from heaven cries, in the awakening language of the prophet, 'Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!'† how little is the warning regarded! How soon is it forgot! Preposterous stupidity! to be utterly unconcerned, where it is the truest wisdom to take the alarm; and to be all trepidation, where there is nothing really terrible! Do thou, my soul, remember thy Saviour's admonition: 'I will forewarn you, whom you shall fear. Fear not these imaginary horrors of the night; but fear that awful Being, whose revelation of himself, though with expressions of peculiar mercy, made Moses, his favourite servant, tremble exceedingly; whose manifestation, when he appears with purposes of inexorable vengeance, will make mighty conquerors, who were familiar with dangers, and estranged to dismay, call upon the mountains to fall on them, and the rocks to cover them: the menace of whose majestic eye, when he comes attended with thousand thousands of his immortal hosts, will make the very heavens cleave asunder, and the earth flee away.

* The story of Brutus, and his evil genius, is well known. Nor must it be denied, that the precise words of the spectre to the hero were, 'I'll meet thee at Philippi.' But as this would not answer my purpose, I was obliged to make an alteration in the circumstance of place.

† Amos iv. 12.

O! dread his displeasure; secure his favour; and then thou mayst commit all thy other anxieties to the wind. Thou mayst laugh at every other fear.'

This brings to my mind a memorable and amazing occurrence, recorded in the book of Job;* which is, I think, no inconsiderable proof of the real existence of apparitions, on some very extraordinary emergencies; while it discountenances those legions of idle tales which superstition has raised and credulity received; since it teaches us, that if, at any time, those visitants from the unknown world render themselves perceivable by mortals, it is not upon any errand of frivolous consequence; but, to convey intelligences of the utmost moment, or to work impressions of the highest advantage.

'Twas in the dead of night. All nature lay shrouded in darkness. Every creature was buried in sleep. The most profound silence reigned through the universe. In these solemn moments, Eliphaz alone, all wakeful and solitary, was musing upon sublime and heavenly subjects. When lo! an awful being, from the invisible realms, burst into his apartment. A spirit passed before his face. Astonishment seized the beholder. His bones shivered within him, his flesh trembled all over him; and the hair of his head stood erect with horror. Sudden and unexpected was the appearance of the phantom; not such its departure. It stood still, to present itself more fully to his view. It made a solemn pause, to prepare his mind for some momentous message. After which, a voice was heard: a voice, for the importance of its meaning, worthy to be had in everlasting remembrance; for the solemnity of its delivery, enough to alarm a heart of stone.

* Job iv. 12, 14, &c.

It spoke; and this was the purport of its words: Shall man, frail man, be just before the mighty God? Shall even the most accomplished of mortals be pure in the sight of his Maker? Behold, and consider it attentively. He put no such trust in his most exalted servants as should bespeak them incapable of defect; and his very angels he charged with folly; as sinking, even in the highest perfection of their holiness, infinitely beneath his transcendant glories; as falling, even in all the fidelity of their obedience, inexpressibly short of the homage due to his adorable majesty. If angelic natures must not presume to justify, either themselves or their services, before uncreated purity; how much more absurd is such a notion, how much more impious such an attempt, in them that dwell in houses of clay; whose origin is from the dust, and whose state is all imperfection!'

I would observe from hence, the very singular necessity of that poverty of spirit which entirely renounces its own attainments; and most thankfully submits to the righteousness of the incarnate God. To inculcate this lesson, the son of the Blessed came down from heaven; and pressed no other principle with so repeated* an importunity on his hearers. To instil the same doctrine, the Holy Ghost touched the lips of the apostles with sacred eloquence; and made it an eminent part of their commission, 'to demolish every high imagination.' That no expe-

* 'It is well worthy of our observation,' says an excellent commentator, 'that no one sentence uttered by our Lord, is so frequently repeated as this: 'Whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted;' which often occurs in the Evangelists; but is never duly accomplished in us, till we disclaim all pretension to merit and righteousness of our own, and seek them only in the atonement and obedience of Jesus Christ.'

dient might be wanting to give it a deep and lasting efficacy on the human mind, a phantom arises from the valley of the shadow of death, or a teacher descends from the habitation of spirits. Whatever then we neglect, let us not neglect to cultivate this grace, which has been so variously taught, so powerfully enforced.

Hark! a doleful voice—with sudden starts, and hideous screams, it disturbs the silence of the peaceful night. 'Tis the screech-owl, sometimes in frantic, sometimes in disconsolate accents uttering her woes. She flies the vocal grove, and shuns the society of all the feathered choir. The blooming gardens and flowery meads have no charms for her. Obscene shades, rugged ruins, and walls overgrown with ivy, are her favourite haunts. Above, the mouldering precipice nods, and threatens a fall; below the toad crawls, or the poisonous adder hisses. The sprightly morning, which awakens other animals into joy, administers no pleasure to this gloomy recluse. Even the smiling face of day is her aversion: and all its lovely scenes create nothing but uneasiness.

So, just so, would it fare with the ungodly, were it possible to suppose their admission into the chaste and bright abodes of endless felicity. They would find nothing but disappointment and shame, even at the fountain head of happiness and honour. For how could the tongue habituated to profaneness, taste any delight in the harmonious adorations of heaven? How could the lips cankered with slander, relish the raptures of everlasting praise? Where would be the satisfaction of the vain beauty, or the supercilious grandee; since, in the temple of the skies, no incence of flattery would be addressed to the former, nor any

obsequious homage paid to the latter? The spotless and inconceivable purity of the blessed God would flash confusion on the lascivious eye. The envious mind must be on a rack of self-tormenting passions, to observe millions of happy beings, shining in all the perfections of glory, and solacing themselves in the fulness of joy. In short, the unsanctified soul, amidst holy and triumphant spirits, even in the refined regions of bliss and immortality, would be, like this melancholy bird, dislodged from her darksome retirement, and imprisoned under the beams of day.*

The voice of this creature screaming at our windows, or of the raven croaking over our houses, is, they say, a token of approaching death. There are persons, who would regard such an incident with no small degree of solicitude. Trivial as it is, it would damp their spirits, perhaps break their rest. One cannot but wonder, that people should suffer themselves to be affrighted at such fantastical, and yet be quite unaffected with real, presages of their dissolution. Real presages of this awful event address us

* I would beg of the reader to observe, with what emphasis and propriety our Lord touches this important point, in his memorable reply to Nicodemus. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; q. d. 'I waive the authority of the Supreme Judge, and speak with the condescension of a teacher in Israel. Though I might, without being liable to the least control, pass it into a sovereign decree; that unrenewed mortals, who are slaves to corrupt appetite, shall not enter the habitations of the just; I rather choose to represent it as a case utterly impossible; and charge the calamity, not upon divine severity but upon human folly. Such persons, from the very nature of things, preclude themselves; they incapacitate their own minds; and contrarieties must be reconciled, before they, in their unregenerate condition, can be partakers of those spiritual and sublime delights.' John iii. 3.

from every quarter. What are these incumbent glooms which overwhelm the world, but a kind of pall provided for nature; and an image of that long night, which will quickly cover the inhabitants of the whole earth? What an affinity has the sleep, which will very soon weigh down my drowsy eye-lids, with that state of entire cessation, in which all my senses must be laid aside! The silent chamber, and the bed of slumber, are a very significant representation of the land, where all things are hushed; all things are forgotten. What meant that deep death-bell note, which, the other evening, saddened the air? Laden with the heaviest accents, it struck our ears, and seemed to knock at the door of our hearts. Surely, it brought a message to surviving mortals, and thus the tidings ran: 'Mortals, the destroyer of your race is on his way. The last enemy has begun the pursuit; and is gaining ground upon you every moment. His paths are strewed with heaps of slain. Even now his javelin has laid one of your neighbours in the dust; and will soon, very soon, aim the inevitable blow at each of your lives.'

We need not go down to the charnel-house, nor carry our search into the repositories of the dead, in order to find memorials of our impending doom. A multitude of these remembrancers are planted in all our paths, and point the heedless passengers to their long home. I can hardly enter a considerable town, but I meet the funeral procession, or the mourners going about the streets: the hatchment suspended on the wall, or the crape streaming in the air, are silent intimations, that both rich and poor have been emptying their houses, and replenishing their sepulchres. I can scarce join in any conversation, but

mention is made of some that are given over by the physician, and hovering on the confines of eternity; of others that have just dropt their clay amidst weeping friends, and are gone to appear before the Judg of all the earth. There's not a newspaper comes to my hand, but amidst all its entertaining narrations, reads several serious lectures of mortality. What else are the repeated accounts—of age, worn out by slow-consuming sicknesses; of youth, dashed to pieces by some sudden stroke of casualty; of patriots, exchanging their seats in the senate for a lodging in the tomb; of misers, resigning their breath, and (O relentless destiny!) leaving their very riches for others? Even the vehicles of our amusement are registers of the deceased, and the voice of fame seldom sounds, but in concert with a knell.

These monitors crowd every place; not so much as the scenes of our diversion excepted. What are the decorations of our public buildings, and the most elegant furniture of our parlours, but the imagery of death, and trophies of the tomb? That marble bust, and those gilded pictures, how solemnly they recognize the fate of others, and speakingly remind us o. our own! I see, I hear, and O! I feel this great truth. It is interwoven with my constitution. The frequent decays of the structure foretel its fatal ruin. What are all the pains that have been darted through my limbs; what every disease that has assaulted my health; but the advanced guards of the foe? What are the languors and weariness that attend the labours of each revolving day, but the more secret practices of the adversary, slowly undermining the earthly tabernacle?

Amidst so many notices, shall we go on thoughtless

and unconcerned? Can none of these prognostics, which are sure as oracles, awaken our attention, and engage our circumspection? Noah, 'tis written, being warned of God, prepared an ark. Imitate, my soul, imitate this excellent example. Admonished by such a cloud of witnesses, be continually putting thyself in a readiness for the last change. Let not that day, of which thou hast so many infallible signs, come upon thee unawares. Get the ivy untwined, and thy affections disentangled from this enchanting world; that thou mayst be able to quit it without reluctance. Get the dreadful hand-writing cancelled, and all thy sins blotted out; that thou mayst depart in peace, and have nothing to fear at the decisive tribunal. Get, O! get thyself interested in the Redeemer's merits, and transformed into his sacred image; then shalt thou be meet for the inheritance of saints in light, and mayst even desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.

Sometimes in my evening walk I have heard

> ——— The wakeful bird
> Sing darkling, and, in shadiest covert hid,
> Tune her nocturnal note. *Par. Lost*, b. iii. 38.

How different the airs of this charming songster from those harsh and boding outcries! The little creature ran through all the variations of music, and showed herself mistress of every grace which constitutes or embellishes harmony. Sometimes she swells a manly throat, and her song kindles into ardour. The tone is so bold, and strikes with such energy, you would imagine the sprightly serenader in the very next thicket. Anon, the strain languishes, and the mournful warbler melts into tenderness. The melancholy notes just steal upon the shades, and faintly touch

your ear; or, in soft and sadly-pleasing accents, they seem to die along the distant vale. Silence is pleased, and night listens to the trilling tale.

What an invitation is this, to slip away from the thronged city! This coy and modest minstrel entertains only the lovers of retirement; those, who are carousing over their bowls, or ranting at the riotous club, lose this feast of harmony. In like manner, the pleasures of religion, and the joy of reconciliation with God; the satisfactions arising from an established interest in Christ, and from the prospect of a blissful immortality; these are all lost to the mind that is ever in the crowd, and dares not, or delights not, to retire into itself. Are we charmed with the nightingale's song? Do we wish to have it nearer, and hear it oftener? Let us seek a renewed heart, and a resigned will; a conscience that whispers peace, and passions that are tuned by grace. Then shall we never want a melody in our own breasts, far more musically pleasing than sweet Philomela's sweetest strains.

As different as the voices of these birds, are the circumstances of those few persons who continue awake. Some are squandering, pearls shall I say, or kingdoms? No; but what is unspeakably more precious, time; squandering this inestimable talent with the most senseless and wanton prodigality. Not content with allowing a few spare minutes for the purpose of necessary recreation, they lavish many hours, devote whole nights, to that idle diversion of shuffling, ranging, and detaching a set of painted pasteboards. Others, instead of this busy trifling, act the part of their own tormentors; they even piquet themselves, and call it amusement; they are

torn by wild horses, yet term it a sport. What else is the gamester's practice? His mind is stretched on the tenter-hooks of anxious suspense, and agitated by the fiercest extremes of hope and fear; while the dice are rattling, his heart is throbbing; his fortune is tottering; and possibly at the very next throw, the one sinks in the gulf of ruin, the other is hurried into the rage of distraction.

Some, snatched from the bloom of health and the lap of plenty, are confined to the chamber of sickness; where they are constrained, either to plunge into the everlasting world in an unprepared condition, or else (sad alternative!) to think over all the follies of a heedless life, and all the bitterness of approaching death. The disease rages; it baffles the force of medicine, and urges the reluctant wretch to the brink of the precipice: while furies rouse the conscience, and point at the bottomless pit below. Perhaps his drooping mother, deprived long ago of the husband of her bosom, and bereft of all her other offspring, is, even now, receiving the blow which consummates her calamities.* In vain she tries to assuage the sorrows

* This brings to my mind one of the deepest mourning pieces extant in the productions of the pen. The sacred historian paints it in all the simplicity of style, yet with all the strength of colouring: 'When Jesus came nigh to the gate of the city, behold! there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.' What a gradation is here! how pathetically beautiful! Every fresh circumstance widens the wound, aggravates the calamity, till the description is worked up into the most finished picture of exquisite and inconsolable distress. He was a young man, cut off in the flower of life, amidst a thousand gay expectations and smiling hopes: a son, an only son; the afflicted mother's all; so that none remained to preserve the name, or perpetuate the family. What rendered the case still more deplorable, she was a widow, left entirely desolate, abandoned to her woes, without any to share her sorrows, or to comfort her under the irreparable loss. Is not this a fine sketch of the

of a beloved son; in vain she attempts, with her tender offices, to prolong a life dearer than her own. He faints in her arms, he bows his head, he sinks in death. Fatal, doubly fatal, that last expiring pang! While it dislodges the unwilling soul, it rends an only child from the yearning embraces of a parent; and tears away the support of her age from a disconsolate widow.

While those long for a reprieve, others invite the stroke. Quite weary of the world, with a restless impatience they sigh for dissolution: some, pining away under the tedious decays of an incurable consumption; or gasping for breath, and almost suffocated by an inundation of dropsical waters. On some, a relentless cancer has fastened its envenomed teeth; and is gnawing them, though in the midst of bodily vigour, in the midst of pitying friends, gradually to death. Others are on a rack of agonies by convulsive fits of the stone. O! how the pain writhes their limbs; how the sweat bedews their flesh; and their eye-balls wildly roll! Methinks, the night condoles with these her distressed children, and sheds dewy tears over their sorrowful abodes. But of all mortals, they are the most exquisitely miserable, who groan beneath the pressure of a melancholy mind; or smart under the lashes of a resentful conscience. Though robed in ermine, or covered with jewels, the state of a slave chained to the galleys, or of an exile condemned to the mines, is a perfect paradise compared with theirs.

O! that the votaries of mirth, whose life is a con-

impassioned and picturesque? Who can consider the narrative with any attention, and not feel his heart penetrated with a tender commiseration?—Luke vii. 12.

tinued round of merriment and whim, would bestow one serious reflection on this variety of human woes! It might teach them to be less enamoured with the few languid sweets that are thinly scattered through this vale of tears, and environed with such a multitude of ragged thorns; it might teach them no longer to dance away their years with a giddy rambling impulse; but to aspire, with a determined aim, after those happy regions, where delights, abundant and unembittered, flow.

Can there be circumstances, which a man of wisdom would more earnestly deprecate, than these several instances of grievous tribulation? There are, and, what is very astonishing, they are frequently the desire and the choice of those, who fancy themselves the sole heirs of happiness; those, I mean, who are launching out into the depths of extravagance, and running excessive lengths of riot; who are prostituting their reputation, and sacrificing their peace, to the gratification of their lusts; sapping the foundation of their health in debaucheries; or ship-wrecking the interests of their families in their bowls; and, what is worse, are forfeiting the joys of an eternal heaven for the sordid satisfactions of the beast, for the transitory sensations of an hour. Ye slaves of appetite, how far am I from envying your gross sensualities and voluptuous revels! Little, ah! little are you sensible, that while indulgence showers her roses, and luxury diffuses her odours, they scatter poisons also, and shed unheeded bane, evils, incomparably more malignant than the wormwood and gall of the sharpest affliction. Since death is in the drunkard's cup, and worse than poniards in the harlot's embrace; may it ever be the privilege of the

man whom I love, to go without his share of these pestilent sweets.

Abundance of living sparks glitter in the lanes, and twinkle under the hedges. I suppose, they are the glow-worms, which have lighted their little lamps, and obtained leave, through the absence of the sun, to play a feeble beam. A faint glimmer just serves to render them perceivable, without tending at all to dissipate the shades, or making any amends for the departed day. Should some weather-beaten traveller, dropping with wet, and shivering with cold, hover round this mimicry of fire, in order to dry his garments, and warm his benumbed limbs; should some bewildered traveller, groping for his way, in a starless night and trackless desert, take one of these languid tapers, as a light to his feet, and a lantern to his paths; how certainly would both the one and the other be frustrated of their expectation! And are they more likely to succeed, who, neglecting that sovereign balm which distilled from the cross, apply any carnal diversity to heal the anxiety of the mind? who, deaf to the infallible decisions of revelation, resign themselves over to the erroneous conjectures of reason, in order to find the way that leadeth unto life? or lastly, who have recourse to the froth of this vain world, for a satisfactory portion, and a substantial happiness? Their conduct is in no degree wiser, their disappointment equally sure, and their miscarriage infinitely more disastrous. To speak in the delicate language of a sacred writer, 'they sow the wind, and will reap the whirlwind.'*

To speak more plainly; the pleasures of the world, which we are all so prone to doat upon; and the

* Hos. viii. 7.

powers of fallen reason, which some are so apt to idolize, are not only vain, but treacherous; not only a painted flame, like these sparkling animals, but much like those unctuous exhalations, which arise from the marshy ground, and often dance before the eyes of the benighted wayfaring man. Kindled into a sort of fire, they personate a guide, and seem to offer their service; but, blazing with delusive light, mislead their follower into hidden pits, headlong precipices, and unfathomable gulfs; where, far from his beloved friends, far from all hopes of succour, the unhappy wanderer is swallowed up and lost.

Not long ago, we observed a very surprising appearance in the western sky; a prodigious star took its flaming route through those coasts, and trailed, as it passed, a tremendous length of fire, almost over half the heavens. Some, I imagine, viewed the portentous stranger with much the same anxious amazement as Belshazzar beheld the handwriting upon the wall. Some looked upon it as a bloody flag, hung out by divine resentment over a guilty world. Some read, in its glaring visage, the fate of nations, and the fall of kingdoms. To others, it shook, or seemed to shake, pestilence and war from its horrid hair. For my part, I am not so superstitious as to regard what every astrologer has to prognosticate upon the accession of a comet, or the projection of its huge vapoury train. Nothing can be more precarious and unjustifiable, than to draw such conclusions from such events; since they neither are preternatural effects, nor do they throw the frame of things into any disorder. I would rather adore that Omnipotent Being, who rolled those stupendous orbs from his creating hand, and leads them, by his providentia

eye, through unmeasurable tracts of ether; who bids them now approach the sun, and glow with unsufferable ardours;* now retreat to the utmost bounds of our planetary system, and make their entry among other worlds.

They are harmless visitants. I acquit them from the charge of causing, or being accessary to, desolating plagues. Would to God there were no other more formidable indications of approaching judgments, or impending ruin! But, alas! when vice becomes predominant, and irreligion almost epidemical; when the sabbaths of a jealous God are notoriously profaned: and that 'name, which is great, wonderful, and holy,' is prostituted to the meanest, or abused to the most execrable purposes; when the worship of our great Creator and Preserver is banished from many of the most conspicuous families; and it is deemed a piece of rude impertinence, so much as to mention the gracious Redeemer in our genteel interviews; when it passes for an elegant freedom of behaviour to ridicule the mysteries of Christianity, and a species of refined conversation to taint the air with lascivious hints; when those, who sit in the scorner's chair, sin with a high hand, and many of those, who wear the professor's garb, are destitute of the power, and content themselves with the mere form of godliness; when such is the state of a community, there is reason, too apparent reason,

* 'The comet in the year 1680, according to Sir Isaac Newton's computation, was, in its nearest approach, above a hundred and sixty-six times nearer the sun than the earth is; consequently, its heat was then twenty-eight thousand times greater than that of summer; so that a ball of iron as big as the earth, heated by it, would hardly become cool in fifty thousand years.'—*Derh. Astr. Theol.* p. 257.

to be horribly afraid. Such phenomena, abounding in the moral world, are not fanciful but real omens. Will not an injured God 'be avenged on such a nation as this?' Will he not be provoked, to 'sweep it with the besom of destruction?'*

O! that the inhabitants of Great Britain would lay these alarming considerations to heart! The Lord of hosts has commanded the sword of civil discord to return into its sheath. But have we returned, every one from his evil ways? Are we become a renewed people, devoted to a dying Saviour, and zealous of good works? What mean those peals of sobs which burst from the expiring cattle? What mean those melancholy moans, where the lusty droves were wont to low?† What mean those arrows of untimely death, discharged on our innocent and useful animals?

No wantonness or sloth has vitiated the blood of these laborious, temperate creatures. They have contracted no disease from unseasonable indulgences and inordinate revellings. The pure stream is their drink, the simple herb their repast. Neither care disturbs their sleep, nor passion inflames their breast. Whence then are they visited with such terrible disorders, as no prudence can prevent, nor any medicines heal?

* Isia. xiv. 23. The Eternal Sovereign, speaking of Babylon, denounces this threatening, 'I will sweep it with the besom of destruction.' What a noble but dreadful image is here! How strongly and awfully pourtrayed! How pregnant also in its signification! intimating the vile nature, and expressing the total extirpation of this wicked people; at the same time suggesting the perfect ease with which the righteous God would execute his intended vengeance.

† If these papers should be so happy as to outlive their author, perhaps it may be needful to inform posterity, that the above-mentioned hints allude to a most terrible, contagious, and mortal distemper raging among the horned cattle, in various parts of the kingdom.

Surely, these calamities are the weapons of divine displeasure, and manifest chastisements of an evil generation. Surely God, the 'God to whom vengeance belongeth,' has still a controversy with our sinful land. And who can tell where the visitation will end? What a storm may follow these prelusive drops! O! that we may 'hear the rod, and who hath appointed it!' Taught by these penal effects of our disobedience, may we remove the accursed thing* from our tents, our practices, our hearts! May we turn from all ungodliness, before wrath come upon us to the uttermost, before iniquity prove our ruin!

Sometimes, at this hour, another most remarkable sight amuses the curious, and alarms the vulgar. A blaze of lambent meteors is kindled, or some very extraordinary lights are refracted, in the quarters of the north. The streams of radiance, like legions rushing to the engagement, meet and mingle; insomuch that the air seems to be all conflicting fire. Within a while they start from one another, and, like legions in precipitate flight, sweep each a separate way through the firmament. Now they are quiescent; anon they are thrown into a quivering motion; presently the whole horizon is illuminated with the glancing flames: sometimes, with an aspect awfully ludicrous, they represent extravagant and antic vagaries: at other times you would suspect that some invisible hand was playing off the dumb artillery of the skies, and, by a strange expedient, giving us the flash without the roar.

The villagers gaze at the spectacle, first with wonder, then with horror. A general panic seizes the country. Every heart throbs, and every face is pale.

* Josh. iv. 18.

The crowds that flock together, instead of diminishing, increase the dread. They catch contagion from each other's looks and words; while fear is in every eye, and every tongue speaks the language of terror. Some see hideous shapes, armies mixing in fierce encounter, or fields swimming with blood. Some foresee direful events, states overthrown, or mighty monarchs tottering on their thrones. Others, scared with still more frightful apprehensions, think of nothing but the day of doom. 'Sure,' says one, 'the unalterable hour is struck, and the end of all things come.' 'See,' replies another, 'how the blasted stars look wan! Are not these the signs of the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven?' 'Jesus prepare us,' (cries a third, and lifts his eyes in devotion,) 'for the archangel's trump, and the great tribunal!'

If this waving brightness, which plays innocently over our heads, be so amazing to multitudes, what inexpressible consternation must overwhelm unthinking mortals when the general conflagration commences! The day, the dreadful day, is approaching, 'in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise,* and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.' That mighty hand, which once opened the windows from on high, and broke up the fountains of the great deep, will then unlock all the magazines of fire, and pour a second deluge upon the earth. The vengeful flames, kindled by the breath of the Almighty, spread themselves from the centre to the circumference. Nothing can withstand their impetuosity, nothing can escape their rage. Universal desolation attends their progress. Magnificent pa-

* 2 Pet. iii. 10.

laces, and solemn temples, are laid in ashes; spacious cities, and impregnable towers, are mingled in one smoking mass. Not only the productions of human art, but the works of Almighty power, are fuel for the devouring element. The everlasting mountains melt, like the snows which cover their summit. Even vast oceans serve only to augment the inconceivable rapidity and fury of the blaze. O! how shall I, or others, stand undismayed amidst the glare of a burning world, unless the Lord Jehovah be our defence? How shall we be upheld in security, when the globe itself is sinking in the fiery ruin; unless the Rock of Ages be our support?

Behold! a new spectacle of wonder! The moon is making her entry on the eastern sky. See her rising in clouded majesty; opening, as it were, and asserting her original commission, to rule over the night. All grand and stately, but somewhat sullied is her aspect. However she brightens as she advances, and grows clearer as she climbs higher; till, at length, her silver loses all its dross; she unveils her peerless light, and becomes 'the beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars;'* delighting every eye, and cheering the whole world, with the brightness of her appearance and the softness of her splendours. O! thou queen of the shades! may it be my ambition to follow this thy instructive example! While others are fond to transcribe the fashions of little courts, and to mimic personages of inferior state; be it mine to imitate thy improving purity! May my conduct become more unblemished, and my temper more refined, as I proceed farther and farther in my probationary course! May every sordid desire wear away, and every irre-

* Ecclus. xliii. 9.

gular appetite be lost, as I make nearer approaches to the celestial mansions! Will not this be a comfortable evidence, that I too shall shine in my adored Redeemer's kingdom; shine, with a richer lustre, than that which radiates from they resplendent orb; shine, with an unfading lustre, when every ray that beams from thy beauteous sphere is totally extinguished?

The day afforded us a variety of entertaining sights. These were all withdrawn at the accession of darkness. The stars, kindly officious, immediately lent us their aid. This served to alleviate the frown of night, rather than to recover the objects from their obscurity. A faint ray, scarcely reflected, and not from the entire surface of things, gave the straining eye a very imperfect glimpse, such as rather mocked than satisfied vision. Now the moon is risen, and has collected all her beams, the veil is taken off from the countenance of nature. I see the recumbent flocks; I see the green hedge-rows, though without the feathered choristers hopping from spray to spray. In short, I see once again the world's great picture: not indeed in its late lively colours, but more delicately shaded, and arrayed in softer charms.*

What a majestic scene is here! Incomparably grand and exquisitely fine!—The moon, like an immense crystal lamp, pendent in the magnificent ceiling of the heavens; the stars, like so many thousands of golden tapers, fixed in their azure sockets—all pouring their lustre on spacious cities and lofty mountains, glittering on the ocean, gleaming on the forest, and

* —— Now reigns
Full orb'd the moon, and with more pleasing light
Shadowy sets off the face of things.—*Milton.*

opening a prospect, wide as the eye can glance, more various than fancy can paint.* We are forward to admire the performances of human art. A landscape, elegantly designed, and executed with a masterly hand; a piece of statuary, which seems, amidst all the recommendations of exact proportion and graceful attitude, to soften into flesh, and almost breathe with life; these little imitations of nature we behold with a pleasing surprise. And shall we be less affected, less delighted, with the inexpressibly noble and completely finished original? The ample dimensions of Ranelagh's dome, the gay illuminations of Vauxhall grove, I should scorn to mention on such an occosion, were they not the objects of general admiration. Shall we be charmed with those puny essays of finite ingenuity, and touched with no transport at this stupendous display of omnipotent skill? at the august grandeur and shining stateliness of the firmament, which forms an alcove for ten thousand worlds, and is ornamented with myriads of everlasting luminaries? Surely this must betray,

* As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er heav'n's clear azure spreads her sacred light;
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene;
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
And stars unnumber'd gild the glowing pole:
O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,
And tip with silver ev'ry mountain's head:
Then shine the vales; the rocks in prospect rise:
A flood of glory bursts from all the skies;
The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,
Eye the blue vault, and bless the useful light.—*Iliad*, viii.

I transcribe these lines, because Mr. Pope says, they exhibit, in the original, the finest night-piece in poetry: and if they are so beautiful in Homer's language, who can suspect their suffering any disadvantage from the pen of his admirable translator!

not only a total want of religion, but the most abject littleness of mind and the utmost poverty of genius.

The moon is not barely 'an ornament in the high places of the Lord,'* but of signal service to the inhabitants of the earth. How uncomfortable is deep, pitchy, total darkness! especially, in the long absence of the winter's sun. Welcome therefore, thrice welcome, this auspicious gift of Providence, to enliven the nocturnal gloom, and line with silver the raven-coloured mantle of night! How desirable to have our summer-evenings illuminated! that we may be able to tread the dewy meads, and breathe the delicious fragrance of our gardens; especially when the sultry heats render it irksome and fatiguing to walk abroad by day! How cheering to the shepherd the use of this universal lantern, as he tends his fleecy charge, or late consigns them to their hurdled cots! How comfortable and how advantageous to the mariner, as he ploughs the midnight main, to adjust the tackling, to explore his way, and, under the influence of this beaming sconce, to avoid the fatal rock! For these and other beneficial purposes the hand of the Almighty has hung the stately branch on high; and filled it with a splendour not confined to a single edifice, or commensurate to a particular square, but diffusive as the whole extent of the hemisphere.

The most faithful of our inferior servants are sometimes tardy in their office, sometimes negligent of their duty; but this celestial attendant is most exactly punctual at all the stated periods of her ministration. If we choose to prolong our journey after the sun is gone down, the moon, during her whole increase, is always ready to act in the capacity of a

* Ecclus. xliii. 9.

guide. If we are inclined to set out very early in the morning, the moon, in her decrease, prevents the dawn, on purpose to offer her assistance; and, because it is so pleasant a thing for the eyes to behold the light, the moon, at her full, by a course of unintermitted waiting, gives us, as it were, a double day. How apparently has the Divine Wisdom interested itself, in providing even for the pleasurable accommodation of man! how desirous, that he should want no piece of commodious furniture, no kind of delightful convenience; and, in prosecution of these benevolent intentions, has annexed so valuable an appendage to the terrestrial globe! Justly, therefore, does the psalmist celebrate that admirable constitution, which ordained the moon and the stars to govern the night, as an instance of rich goodness and of mercy which endureth for ever.*

The moon, it is confessed, is no luminous body. All the brightness which beautifies her countenance, is originally in the sun, and no more than transmissively in her. That glorious orb is the parent of day, and the palace of light. From thence the morning-star gilds her horn, from thence the planetary circles are crowned with lustre, and from thence the moon derives all her silver radiance. It is pleasing to reflect, that such is the case with the all-sufficient Redeemer, and his dependent people. We are replenished from his fulness. What do we possess which we have not received, and what can we desire which we may not expect, from that never-failing Source of all good? He is the author of our faith, and the former of our graces. In his unspotted life we see the path, in his meritorious death the price,

* Psalm cxxxvi. 9.

and in his triumphant resurrection the proof of bliss and immortality. If we offend, and fall seven times a day, he is the Lord our Peace.* If we are depraved, and our best deeds very unworthy, he is the Lord our Righteousness.† If we are blind, and even brutish in heavenly knowledge, he is the Lord our Wisdom:‡ his word dispels the shades, his Spirit scatters the intellectual gloom, his eye looks our darkness into day. In short, we are nothing, and 'Christ is all.' Worse than defective in ourselves, 'we are complete in him.' So that if we shine, it is with delegated rays, and with borrowed light. We act by a strength, and glory in merits not our own. O! may we be thoroughly sensible of our dependence on the Saviour! May we constantly imbibe his propitious beams, and never, by indulging unbelief, or backsliding into folly, withdraw our souls from his benign influences; lest we lose our comfort and our holiness, as the fair ruler of the night loses her splendour, when her urn is turned from its fountain,§ and receives no more communications of solar effulgence.

The moon is incessantly varying, either in her aspect or her stages. Sometimes she looks full upon us, and her visage is all lustre; sometimes she appears in profile, and shows us only half her enlightened face; anon a radiant crescent but just adorns her brow; soon it dwindles into a slender streak; till at length, all her beauties vanish, and she becomes a

* Judg. vi. 23. † Jer. xxiii. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 30.

§ Alluding to those truly poetical lines in Milton:

Hither, as to their fountain, other stars
Repairing, in their golden urns draw light.
Par. Lost, b. vii. l. 364

beamless orb. Sometimes she rises with the descending day, and begins her procession amidst admiring multitudes; ere long, she defers her progress till the midnight watches, and steals unobserved upon the sleeping world. Sometimes she just enters the edges of the western horizon, and drops us a ceremonious visit; within a while, she sets out on her nightly tour, from the opposite regions of the east, traverses the whole hemisphere, and never offers to withdraw, till the more refulgent partner of her sway renders her presence unnecessary. In a word, she is, while conversant among us, still waxing or waning, and 'never continueth in one stay.'

Such is the moon, and such are all sublunary things, exposed to perpetual vicissitudes. How often and how soon have the faint echoes of renown slept in silence, or been converted into the clamours of obloquy! The same lips, almost with the same breath, cry Hosanna, and Crucify. Have not riches confessed their notorious treachery a thousand and a thousand times; either melting away, like snow in our hands, by insensible degrees, or escaping, like a winged prisoner from its cage, with a precipitate flight? Have we not known the bridegroom's closet an antechamber to the tomb; and heard the voice, which so lately pronounced the sparkling pair husband and wife, proclaim an everlasting divorce, and seal the decree with that solemn asseveration, 'Ashes to ashes, dust to dust?' Our friends, though the medicine of life; our health, though the balm of nature; are a most precarious possession. How soon may the first become a corpse in our arms, and how easily is the last destroyed in its vigour! You have seen, no doubt, a set of pretty painted birds, perch-

ing on your trees, or sporting in your meadows; you were pleased with the lovely visitants, that brought beauty on their wings, and melody in their throats. But could you insure the continuance of this agreeable entertainment? No; truly. At the least disturbing noise, at the least terrifying appearance, they start from their seats, they mount the skies, and are gone in an instant, are gone for ever. Would you choose to have a happiness which bears date with their arrival, and expires at their departure? If you could not be content with a portion, enjoyable only through such a fortuitous term, not of years, but of moments, O! take up with nothing earthly, set your affections on things above: there alone is 'no variableness or shadow of turning.'

Job is not a more illustrious pattern of patience, than an eminent exemplification of this remark. View him in his private estate: He heaps up silver as the dust, he washes his steps in butter, and the rock pours him out rivers of oil. View him in his public character: princes revere his dignity, the aged listen to his wisdom, every eye beholds him with delight, every tongue loads him with blessings. View him in his domestic circumstances: On one hand, he is defended by a troop of sons, on the other adorned with a train of daughters, and on all sides surrounded by 'a very great household.' Never was human felicity more consummate, never was disastrous revolution so sudden. The lightning which consumed his cattle was not more terrible, and scarce more instantaneous. The joyful parent is bereft of his offspring, and his 'children are buried in death;' the man of affluence is stript of his abundance, and he who was clothed in scarlet, embraces the dunghill.

The venerable patriarch is the derision of scoundrels, and the late darling of an indulgent Providence is become 'a brother to dragons, a companion of owls.' Nor need we go back to former ages for proofs of this afflicting truth. In our times, in all times, the wheel continues the same incessant whirl; and, frequently, those who are triumphing to-day in the highest elevations of joy, to-morrow are bemoaning the instability of mortal affairs in the very depth of misery. Amidst so much fluctuation and uncertainty, how wretched is the condition, which has no anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast. May thy loving-kindness, O God, be our present treasure, and thy future glory, our reversionary inheritance! Then shall our happiness, not be like the full-orbed moon, which is 'a light that decreaseth in its perfection,' but like the sun when he goeth forth in his strength, and knoweth no other change, but that of shining more and more unto the perfect day.

Methinks, in this ever-varying sphere, I see a representation, not only of our temporal advantages, but also of our spiritual accomplishments. Such, I am sure, is what the kind partiality of a friend would call my righteousness; and such, I am apt to suspect, is the righteousness of every man living. Now we exercise it, in some few instances, in some little degrees; anon sin revives, and leads our souls into a transient, though unwilling captivity. Now we are meek; but soon a ruffling accident intervenes, and turns our composure into a fretful disquietude. Now we are humble; soon we reflect upon some inconsiderable or imaginary superiority over others, and a sudden elatement swells our minds. Now, perhaps, we possess a clean heart, and are warm

with holy love; but O! how easily is the purity of our affections sullied; how soon the fervour of our gratitude cooled! And is there not something amiss, even in our best moments; something to be ashamed of, in all we are; something to be repented of, in all we do?

With what gladness, therefore, and adoring thankfulness, should we 'submit to the righteousness of our incarnate God;' and receive, as a divine gift, what cannot be acquired by human works![*] A writer of the first distinction and nicest discernment, styles the obedience of our glorious Surety, an everlasting righteousness;[†] such as was subject to no interruption, nor obscured by the least blemish; but proceeded always in the same uniform tenor of the most spotless perfection. This righteousness, in another sense, answers the prophet's exalted description; as its beneficial and sovereign efficacy knows no end; but lasts through all our life, lasts in the trying hour of death, lasts at the decisive day of judgment, lasts through every generation, and will last to all eternity.

Sometimes I have seen that resplendent globe stript of her radiance; or, according to the emphatical language of Scripture, 'turned into blood.' The earth, interposing with its opaque body, intercepted the solar rays, and cast its own gloomy shadow on the moon. The malignant influence gained upon her sickening orb; extinguished more and more the feeble remainders of light, till at length, like one in a deep swoon, no comeliness was left in her countenance; she was totally overspread with darkness. At this juncture, what a multitude of eyes were gazing

[*] Rom. v. 17. x. 3. [†] Dan. ix. 24.

upon the rueful spectacle! even of those eyes which disregarded the empress of the night, or beheld her with indifference, when, robed in glory, and riding in her triumphal chariot, she shed a softer day through the nations. But now, under these circumstances of disgrace, they watch her motions with the most prying attention. In every place, her misfortune is the object of general observation, and the prevailing topic of discourse in every company.

Is it not thus, with regard to persons of eminence, in their respective spheres? Kings, at the head of their subjects; nobles, surrounded with their dependents; and (after names of so much grandeur, may I be allowed to add?) ministers labouring among their people;* are each in a conspicuous station. Their conduct, in its minutest step, especially in any miscarriage, will be narrowly surveyed, and critically scanned. Can there be a louder call, to ponder the paths of their feet, and to be particularly jealous over all their ways? Those who move in inferior life, may grossly offend, and little alarm be given, perhaps no notice taken; but it is not to be expected, that the least slip in their carriage, the least flaw in their character, will pass undiscovered. Malice, with her eagle-eyes, will be sure to discern them; while censure, with her shrill trumpet, will be as far from concealing them, as calumny, with her treacherous whispers, from extenuating them. A planet may sink below the horizon; or a star, for several months, withdraw its shining; and scarce one in ten thousand perceive the loss; but if the moon suffers a transient eclipse, almost half the world are spectators of her dishonour.

* Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a *hill*, cannot be hid. Matt. v. 14.

Very different was the case, when, at this late hour, I have taken a solitary walk on the western cliffs. At the foot of the steep mountain, the sea, all clear and smooth, spread itself into an immense plain, and held a watery mirror to the skies. Infinite heights above, the firmament stretched its azure expanse; bespangled with unnumbered stars, and adorned with the moon, 'walking in brightness.'* She seemed to contemplate herself with a peculiar pleasure, while the transparent surface, both received, and returned her silver image. Here, instead of being covered with sackcloth, she shone with double lustre; or rather, with a lustre multiplied, in proportion to the number of beholders, and their various situations.

Such, methinks, is the effect of an exemplary behaviour in persons of exalted rank. Their course, as it is nobly distinguished, so it will be happily influential; others will catch the diffusive ray, and be ambitious to resemble a pattern so attracting, so commanding. Their amiable qualities will not terminate in themselves, but we shall see them reflected from their families, their acquaintance, their retainers; just as we may now behold another moon, trembling in the stream, glittering in the canal, and displaying its lovely impress on every collection of waters.

The moon, philosophy says, is a sort of sovereign over the great deep: her orb, like a royal sceptre, sways the ocean, and actuates the fluid realms; it swells the tides, and perpetuates the reciprocal returns of ebb and flow; by which means, the liquid element purges off its filth, and is preserved from being putrefied itself, and from poisoning the world.

* Job xxxi. 26.

Is the moon thus operative on the vast abyss; and shall not the faith of eternal and infinite delights to come, be equally efficacious on this soul of mine? Far above her argent fields are treasures of happiness, unseen by mortal eye, by mortal ear unheard, and unconceived by any human imagination. In that desirable world, the most distinguished and exalted honours also are conferred; in comparison with which, the thrones and diadems of earthly monarchs are empty pageants and childish toys. Yonder arch of sapphire, with all its spangles of gold, is but the floor of those divine abodes. What then are the apartments; what is the palace? How bright with glories; how rich with bliss!

O! ye mansions of blessedness; ye beauties of my Father's kindom, which far outshine these lamps of the visible heaven, transmit your sweet and winning invitations to my heart. Attract and refine all my affections; withdraw them from stagnating on the sordid shores of flesh; never suffer them to settle upon the impure lees of sense; but impress them with emotions of restless desires after sublime and celestial joys; joys, that will proceed, still proceed in a copious and everlasting flow, when seas shall cease to roll; joys, that will charm every faculty with unimaginable pleasure, when the moon, with her waxing splendours, shall cheer our sight no more.

Enough for the present evening. My thoughts have been sufficiently exercised, and my steps begin to be attended with weariness. Let me obey the admonition of nature, and give respite to my meditations, slumber to my eyes. But stay. Shall I retire to the bed of sleep with as little ceremony, and with as much inattention, as the brutes to their sordid lair? Are no acknowledgments due to that Divine Being,

who is the support of my life, and the length of my days? Have I no farther need of his protecting care, no more occasion for the blessings of his goodness? Lepidus, perhaps, may laugh at the bended knee; and have a thousand darts of raillery ready to discharge on the practice of devotion. The wits, I know, are unmercifully severe on what they call the drudgery of prayer, and the fantastical rant of praise. These they leave to the illiterate labourer and the mean mechanic; or treat them with a contemptuous sneer, as the parson's ignoble trade.

Is it then an instance of superstitious blindness to distinguish, or of whimsical zeal, to celebrate, the most super-eminent excellency and merit? Is it an ungraceful business, or does it argue a grovelling disposition, to magnify goodness transcendently rich and diffusive? What can be so truly becoming a dependent state, as to pay our adoring homage to the Author of all perfection, and profess our devoted allegiance to the supreme Almighty Governor of the universe? Can any thing more significantly bespeak an ingenious temper, or administer a more real satisfaction to its finest feelings, than the exercises of penitential devotion; by which we give vent to an honest anguish, or melt into filial sorrow for our insensibility to the best of friends, for our disobedience to the best of parents? In a word, can there be a more sublime pleasure than to dwell, in fixed contemplation, on the beauties of the Eternal Mind; the amiable original of all that is fair, grand, and harmonious; the beneficent giver of all that is convenient, comfortable, and useful? Can there be a more advantageous employ than to present our requests to the Father of Mercies; opening our minds to the irradiations of his wisdom, and all the facul-

ties of our souls to the communications of his grace? —It is strange, unaccountably strange, that the notion of dignity in sentiment, and the pursuit of refined enjoyment, should ever be disunited from devotion; that persons, who make pretensions to an improved taste and exalted genius, should neglect this most ennobling intercourse with the wisest and best of beings, the inexhaustible source of honour and joy.

Shall I be deterred from approaching this source of the purest delight? deterred from pursuing this highest improvement of my nature? deterred from all by a formidable banter, or confuted by one irrefragable smile? No; let the moon, in her resplendent sphere; and yonder pole, with all its starry train, witness, if I be silent even or morn; if I refrain to kindle in my heart, and breathe from my lips, the reasonable incense of praise; praise to that great and glorious God, who formed the earth, and built the skies; who poured from his hand the watery world and shed the all-surrounding air abroad—'Thou also madest the night, Maker Omnipotent! and Thou, the day! which I, though less than the least of all thy mercies, have passed in safety, tranquillity, and comfort. When I was lost in the extravagance of dreams, or lay immersed in the insensibility of sleep; thy hand recovered me from the temporary lethargy; thy hand set a new, a delicately fine edge, on all my blunted senses; and strung my sinews with recruited vigour. When my thoughts were benumbed and stupified, thy quickening influence roused them into activity; when they were disconcerted and wild, thy regulating influence reduced them into order; refitting me at once to relish the innocent entertainments of an animal, and to enjoy the sublime grati-

fications of a rational capacity. When darkness covered the creation, at thy command the sun arose; painted the flowers, and distinguished every object gave light to my feet, and gave nature, with all her beautiful scenes, to my eye. To Thee, O Thou God of my strength, I owe the continuance of my being, and the vivacity of my constitution. By thy sacred order, without any consciousness of mine, the wheels of life move, and the crimson fountain plays. Overruled by thy exquisite skill, it transforms itself by the nicest operations of an inexplicable kind of chemistry, into a variety of the finest secretions, which glide into the muscles, and swell them for action; or pour themselves into the fluids, and repair their incessant decays; which cause cheerfulness to sparkle in the eye, and health to bloom in the cheek.

'Disastrous accidents, injurious to the peace of my mind, or fatal to the welfare of my body, beset my paths; but thy faithfulness and truth, like an impenetrable shield, guarded me all around. Under this divine protection, I walked secure amidst legions of apparent perils; and passed unhurt through a far greater multiplicity of unseen evils. Not one of my bones was broken; not a single shaft grazed upon my ease; even when the eye that watched over me, saw, in its wide survey, thousands falling beside me in irrecoverable ruin, and ten thousands deeply wounded on my right hand. If sickness has at any time saddened my chamber, or pain harrowed my flesh, it was a wholesome discipline and a gracious severity; the chastisement proved a sovereign medicine to cure me of an immoderate fondness for this imperfect troublesome state, and to quicken my desires after the unembittered enjoyments of my eternal home. Has not thy munificence, unwearied and unbounded, spread

my table; and furnished it with the finest wheat, replenished it with marrow and fatness; while temperance sweetened the bowl, appetite seasoned the dish, contentment and gratitude crowned the repast? Has not thy kindness, O God of the families of Israel, preserved my affectionate relations; who study, by their tender offices, to soften every care, and heighten every joy? Has not thy kindness given me valuable friends, whose presence is a cordial to cheer me in a dejected hour, and whose conversation mingles improvement with delight?

'When sin lay disguised amidst flowery scenes of pleasure; enlightened by thy wisdom, I discerned the latent mischief; made resolute by thy grace, I shunned the luscious bane. If, through the impulse of sensuality or the violence of passion, I have been hurried into the snare, and stung by the serpent; thy faithful admonitions have recalled the foolish wanderer, while the blood of thy Son has healed his deadly wounds. Some, no doubt, have been cut off in the midst of their iniquities; and transmitted, from the thrillings of polluted joy, to the agonies of eternal despair: whereas I have been distinguished by long-suffering mercy; and, instead of lifting up my eyes in torments, to behold a heaven irrecoverably lost; I may lift them up under the pleasing views of being admitted, ere long, into those abodes of endless felicity. In the mean time thou hast vouchsafed me the revelation of thy will, the influences of thy Spirit, and abundance of the most effectual aids for advancing in knowledge and growing in godliness; for becoming more conformable to thy image, and more meet for thy presence; for tasting the pleasures of religion, and securing the riches of eternity.

'How various is thy beneficence, O thou lover of

souls! It has unsealed a thousand sources of good; opened a thousand avenues of delight; and heaped blessings upon me with a ceaseless liberality. If I should attempt to declare them, they would be more than the starry host which glitter in this unclouded sky; more than the dewy gems which will adorn the face of the morning.

'And shall I forget the God of my salvation, the Author of all my mercies? Rather let my pulse forget to beat! Shall I render him no expressions of thankfulness? Then might all nature reproach my ingratitude. Shall I rest satisfied with the bare acknowledgment of my lips? No; let my life be vocal, and speak his praise, in that only genuine, that most emphatical language—the language of devout obedience. Let the bill be drawn upon my very heart; let all my affections acknowledge the draft; and let the whole tenor of my actions, in time and through eternity, be continually paying the debt, the ever-pleasing, ever-growing debt of duty, veneration, and love.

'And can I, O thou Guide of my goings, and Guardian of all my interests, can I distrust such signal, such experienced goodness? Thou hast been my helper through all the busy scenes of day; therefore under the shadow of thy wings will I repose myself during the darkness, the danger, and death-like inactivity of the night. Whatever defilement I have contracted, wash it thoroughly away in redeeming blood; and let neither the sinful stain, nor the sinful inclination, accompany me to my couch! Then shall I lay me down in peace, and take my rest; cheerfully referring it to thy all-wise determination, whether I shall open my eyes in this world, or awake in the unknown regions of another.'

CONTEMPLATIONS

ON

THE STARRY HEAVENS.

This evening I exchange the nice retreats of art for the noble theatre of nature. Instead of measuring my steps under the covert of an arbour, let me range along the summit of this gently rising hill. There is no need of the leafy shade, since the sun has quitted the horizon, and withdrawn his scorching beams. But see, how advantages and inconveniences are usually linked, and chequer our affairs below! If the annoying heart ceases, the landscape and its pleasing scenes are also removed. The majestic castle and the lowly cottage are vanished together. I have lost the aspiring mountain and its russet brow; I look round, but to no purpose, for the humble vale and its flowery lap. The plains whitened with flocks, and the heath yellow with furze, disappear. The advancing night has wrapt in darkness the long extended forest; and drawn her mantle over the windings of the silver stream. I no longer behold that luxuriant fertility in the fields, that wild magnificence of prospect, and endless variety of images, which have so often touched me with delight, and struck me with awe, from this commanding eminence.

The loss, however, is scarcely to be regretted, since

it is amply compensated by the opening beauties of the sky. Here I enjoy a free view of the whole hemisphere, without any obstacle from below, to confine the exploring eye; or any cloud from above, to overcast the spacious concave. 'Tis true, the lively vermilion, which so lately streaked the chambers of the west, is all faded; but the planets, one after another, light up their lamps; the stars advance in their glittering train; a thousand and a thousand luminaries shine forth in successive splendours, and the whole firmament is kindled into the most beautiful glow. The blueness of the ether, heightened by the season of the year, and still more enlivened by the absence of the moon, give those gems of heaven the strongest lustre.

One pleasure more the invading gloom has not been able to snatch from my sense; the night rather improves than destroys the fragrance which exhales from the blooming beans; with these the sides of this sloping declivity are lined; and with these the balmy zephyrs perfume their wings. Does Arabia, from her spicy groves, breathe a more liberal or a more charming gale of sweets? And what is a peculiar recommendation of the rural entertainments presented in our happy land, they are alloyed by no apprehensions of danger. No poisonous serpent lurks under the blossom; nor any ravenous beast lies ready to start from the thicket.—But I wander from a far more exalted subject. My thoughts, like my affections, are too easily diverted from the heavens, and detained by inferior objects. Away, my attention, from these little blandishments of the earth, since all the glories of the sky invite thy regard.

We have taken a turn among the tombs, and

viewed the solemn memorials of the dead, in order to learn the vanity of mortal things, and to break their soft enchantment. We have surveyed the ornaments of the garden; not that the heart might be planted in the parterre, or take root among the flowery race; but that these delicacies of a day might teach us to aspire after a better paradise, where beauty never fades, and delight is ever in the bloom. A third time we lighted the candle of meditation, and sought for wisdom, not in the crowded city or wrangling schools; but in the silent and lonely walks of ancient night.* Let us once more indulge the contemplative vein, and raise our speculations to those sublimer works of the great Creator, which the regions of the sky contain, and this dusky hour unveils.†

If we have discerned the touches of his pencil, glowing in the colours of spring; if we have seen a sample of his beneficence, exhibited in the stores of nature; and a ray of his brightness, beaming in the blaze of day; what an infinitely richer field for the display of his perfections are the heavens! The heavens, in the most emphatical manner, declare the glory of God. The heavens, are nobly eloquent of the Deity, and the most magnificent heralds of their Maker's praise. They speak to the whole universe; for there is neither speech so barbarous, but their language is understood; nor nation so distant, but their voices are heard among them.‡ Let me then, in this solemn

* Refering to the several subjects of the three preceding essays.

† Night opes the noblest scenes, and sheds an awe
Which gives those venerable scenes full weight,
And deep reception in the entender'd heart.
Night Thoughts, N. ix.

‡ Psal. xix. 3.

season, formed for thought, and a calm intercourse with heaven; let me listen to their silent lectures: perhaps I may receive such impressive manifestations of 'the Eternal Power and Godhead,' as may shed religion on my soul, while I walk the solitary shades; and may be a tutelary friend to my virtue, when the call of business, and the return of light, expose me again to the inroads of temptation.

The Israelites, instigated by frenzy rather than devotion, worshipped the host of heaven; and the pretenders to judicial astrology talk of, I know not what, mysterious efficacy in the different aspect of the stars, or the various conjunction and opposition of the planets. Let those who are unacquainted with the sure word of revelation, give ear to these sons of delusion and dealers in deceit: for my part, it is a question of indifference to me, whether the constellations shone with smiles, or lowered in frowns, on the hour of my nativity. Let Christ be my guard, and, secure in such a protection, I would laugh at their impotent menaces. Let Christ be my guide, and I shall scorn to ask, as well as despair of receiving, any predictory information from such senseless masses. What! shall 'the living seek to the dead?'* Can these bodies advertise me of future events, which are unconscious of their own existence? Shall I have recourse to dull unintelligent matter, when I may apply to that all-wise Being, who, with one comprehensive glance, distinctly views whatever is lodged in the bosom of immensity, or forming in the womb of futurity? Never, never, will I search for any intimations of my fate, but often trace my

* Isa. viii. 19.

Creator's footsteps* in yonder starry plains. In the former case, they would be teachers of lies; in the latter, they are oracles of truth. In this, therefore, this sense only, I profess myself the pupil of the stars.

The vulgar are apprehensive of nothing more than a multitude of bright spangles, dropped over the ethereal blue. They have no higher notion of these fine appearances, than that they are so many golden studs, with which the empyrean arch is decorated. But studious minds, that carry a more accurate and strict inquiry among the celestial bodies, bring back advices of a most astonishing import. Let me just recollect the most material of those stupendous discoveries, in order to furnish out proper subjects for contemplation. And let the unlearned remember, that the scene I am going to display, is the workmanship of that incomprehensible God, who is 'perfect in knowledge, and mighty in power;' whose

† 'It is most becoming (says a great author) such imperfect creatures as we are, to contemplate the works of God with this design, that we may discern the manifestations of wisdom in them, and thereby excite in ourselves those devout affections, and that superlative respect, which is the very essence of praise, as it is a reasonable and moral service.' Abernethy on the Attributes.—And, indeed, if we are sincerely disposed to employ ourselves in this excellent, this delightful duty of praising the infinite Creator, the means and the motives are both at hand. His works, in a wonderful and instructive variety, present themselves with pregnant manifestations of the most transcendent excellencies of their Maker. They pour their evidence from all quarters, and into all the avenues of the mind. They invite us, especially, in the magnificent system of the universe, to contemplate—counsel, consummately wise; and execution, inimitably perfect; power to which nothing is impossible; and goodness, which extendeth to all, which endureth for ever.—To give, not a full display, but only some slight strictures of these glorious truths, is the principal scope of the following remarks.

name, whose nature, and all whose operations, are 'great and marvellous;' who summons into being, with equal ease, a single grain or ten thousand worlds. To this if we continually advert, the assertions, though they will certainly excite our admiration, need not transcend our belief.

The earth is, in fact, a round body, however it may seem in some parts to be sunk into vales, and raised into hills;* in other parts, to be spread into a spacious plain, extending to the confines of the heavens, or terminated by the waters of the ocean. We may fancy, that it has deep foundations, and rests upon some prodigiously solid basis. But it is pendent in the wide transpicuous ether, without any visible cause to uphold it from above, or support it from beneath. It may seem to be sedentary in its attitude, and motionless in its situation; but it is continually sailing † through the depths of the sky, and in the space of twelve months finishes the mighty voyage: which periodical rotation produces the seasons, and completes the year. As it proceeds in the

* A learned writer, I think Dr. Derham, has somewhere an observation to this purpose: 'That the loftiest summits of hills, and the most enormous ridges of mountains, are no real objection to the globular or round form of the earth; because, however they may render it to our limited sight, vastly uneven and protuberant, yet they bear no more proportion to the entire surface of the terraqueous ball, than a particle of dust, casually dropped on the mathematician's globe bears to its whole circumference; consequently, the rotund figure is no more destroyed in the former case, than in the latter. On the same principle I have not thought it necessary to take any notice of the comparatively small difference between the polar and equatorial diameter of the earth.

† With what amazing speed this vessel (if I may carry on the allusion), filled with a multitude of nations, and freighted with all their possessions, makes her way through the ethereal space.

annual circuit, it spins upon its own centre, and turns its sides alternately to the fountain of light: by which means the day dawns in one hemisphere while the night succeeds in the other. Without this expedient, one part of its regions would, during half the great revolution, be scorched with excessive heat, or languish under an unintermitted glare; while the other, exposed to the contrary extremes, would be frozen to ice, and buried under a long oppression of dismal and destructive darkness.

I cannot forbear taking notice, that in this compound motion of the earth, the one never interferes with the other, but both are perfectly compatible. It is not thus with the precepts of religion, and the needful affairs of the present life, not excepting even the innocent gratifications of our appetites? Some, I believe, are apt to imagine, that they must renounce society if they devote themselves to Christ; and abandon all the satisfactions of this world, if they once become zealous candidates for the felicity of another. But this is a very mistaken notion, or else a very injurious representation, of the doctrine which is according to godliness. It was never intended to drive men into deserts, but to lead them through the peaceful and pleasant paths of wisdom, into the blissful regions of life eternal. It was never intended to strike off the wheels of business, or cut in sunder the sinews of industry; but rather to make men industrious from a principle of conscience, not from the instigations of avarice; that so they may promote their immortal happiness, even while they provide for their temporal maintenance. It has no design to extirpate our passions, but only to restrain their irregularities; neither would it extinguish the de-

lights of sense, but prevent them from evaporating into vanity, and subsiding into gall. A person may be cheerful among his friends, and yet joyful in God. He may taste the sweets of his earthly estate, and at the same time cherish his hopes of a nobler inheritance in heaven. The trader may prosecute the demands of commerce, without neglecting to negotiate the affairs of his salvation. The warrior may wear his sword, may draw in a just cause that murderous weapon, yet be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and obtain the crown that fadeth not away. The parent may lay up a competent portion for his children, and not forfeit his title to the treasures either of grace or of glory. So far is Christianity from obstructing any valuable interest, or withholding any real pleasure, that it improves the one, and advances the other: just as the diurnal and annual motions are so far from clashing, that they entirely accord; and, instead of being destructive of each other, by mutually blending their effects, they give proportion and harmony to time, fertility and innumerable benefits to nature.

To us, who dwell on its surface, the earth is by far the most extensive orb that our eyes can any where behold. It is also clothed with verdure, distinguished by trees, and adorned with a variety of beautiful decorations. Whereas to a spectator placed on one of the planets, it wears an uniform aspect, looks all luminous, and no larger than a spot; to beings, who dwell at still greater distances, it entirely disappears. That which we call, alternately, the morning and evening star; as in one part of her orbit she rides foremost in the procession of night; in the other, ushers in and anticipates the dawn; is a planetary

world; which, with the four others, that so wonderfully vary their mystic dance, are in themselves dark bodies, and shine only by reflection; have fields, and seas, and skies of their own; are furnished with all accommodations for animal subsistence, and are supposed to be the abodes of intellectual life: all which, together with this our earthly habitation, are dependent on that grand dispenser of divine munificence, the sun; receive their light from the distribution of his rays, and derive their comforts from his benign agency.

The sun, which seems to perform its daily stages through the sky, is, in this respect,* fixed and immovable. 'Tis the great axle of heaven, about which the globe we inhabit, and other more spacious orbs, wheel their stated courses. The sun, though seemingly smaller than the dial it illuminates, is abundantly larger† than the whole earth; on which so many lofty moutains rise, and such vast oceans roll. A line extending from side to side, through the centre of that resplendent orb, would measure more than eight hundred thousand miles; a girdle, formed to go round its circumference, would require a length of millions: were its solid contents to be estimated, the account would overwhelm our understanding, and be almost beyond the power of language to express.‡ Are we startled at these reports of philo-

* I say, in this respect, that I may not seem to forget or exclude the revolution of the sun round its own axis.

† A hundred thousand times, according to the lowest reckoning. Sir Isaac Newton computes the sun to be 900,000 times bigger than the earth.—*Religious Philosopher*, p. 749.

‡ Dr. Derham, after having calculated the dimensions of the planets, adds,—'Amazing as these masses are, they are all far outdone by that stupendous globe of light, the sun: which, as it is the fountain of light and heat to all the

sophy? Are we ready to cry out, in a transport of surprise: 'How mighty is the Being who kindled such a prodigious fire, and keeps alive, from age to age, such an enormous mass of flame!' Let us attend our philosophic guides, and we shall be brought acquainted with speculations more enlarged and more amazing.

This sun, with all its attendant planets, is but a very little part of the grand machine of the universe. Every star, though in appearance no bigger than the diamond that glitters upon a lady's ring, is really a vast globe, like the sun in size and glory; no less spacious, no less luminous, than the radiant source of our day; so that every star is not barely a world, but the centre of a magnificent system; has a retinue of worlds, irradiated by its beams, and revolving round its attractive influence; all which are lost to our sight, is unmeasurable wilds of ether. That the stars appear like so many diminutive and scarce distinguishable points, is owing to their immense and inconceivable distance. Immense and inconceivable indeed it is; since a ball, shot from the loaded cannon, and flying with unabated rapidity, must travel, at this impetuous rate, almost seven hundred thousand years,* before it could reach the nearest of those twinkling luminaries.

Can any thing be more wonderful than these observations? Yes; there are truths far more stupendous; there are scenes far more extensive. As there is no end of the Almighty Maker's greatness, so no

planets about it, so doth it far surpass them all in its bulk; its apparent diameter being computed at 822,148 English miles, its ambit at 2,582,873 miles, and its solid contents at 290,971,000,000,000,000.'—*Astro. Theol.* book I. chap. ii.

* See Religious Philosopher, p. 819.

imagination can set limits to his creating hand. Could you soar beyond the moon, and pass through all the planetary choir; could you wing your way to the highest apparent star, and take your stand on one of those loftiest pinnacles of heaven; you would, there, see other skies expanded; another sun, distributing his inexhaustible beams by day; other stars, that gild the horrors of the alternate night: and other,* perhaps nobler systems, established; established, in unknown profusion, through the boundless dimensions of space. Nor does the dominion of the universal Sovereign terminate there. Even at the end of this vast tour, you would find yourself advanced no farther than the suburbs of creation, arrived only at the frontiers of the great Jehovah's kingdom.

And do they tell me, that the sun, the moon, and all the planets, are but a little part of his works? How great, then, are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders!† And if so, what is the Creator himself? how far exalted above all praise! who is so high, that he looks down on the highest of these dazzling spheres, and sees even the summit of creation in a vale: so great, that this prodigious extent of space is but a point in his presence; and all this confluence of worlds as the lightest atom that fluctuates in air, and sports in the meridian ray.

Thou most sublime and incomprehensibly glorious

* See Astro-Theology, book ii. chap. ii.—Where the author, having assigned various reasons to support this theory of our modern astronomers, adds: 'Besides the fore-mentioned strong probabilities, we have this farther recommendation of such an account of the universe, that it is far more magnificent, and worthy of the infinite Creator, than any other of the narrower schemes.

† Dan. iv. 3.

God, how am I overwhelmed with awe; how sunk into the lowest prostration of mind; when I consider thy 'excellent greatness,' and my own utter insignificancy! And have I, excessively mean as I am, have I entertained any conceited apprehensions of myself? Have I felt the least elatement of thought in the presence of so majestic and adorable a Being? How should this wound me with sorrow, and cover me with confusion! O my God, was I possessed of all the high perfections which accomplish and adorn the angels of light; amidst all these nobler endowments, I would fall down in the deepest abasement at thy feet. Lost in the infinitely superior blaze of thy uncreated glories, I would confess myself to be nothing, to be less than nothing, and vanity. How much more ought I to maintain the most unfeigned humiliation, before thy divine Majesty, who am not only dust and ashes, but a compound of ignorance, imperfection, and depravity!

While beholding that vast expanse, I learn my own extreme meanness; I would also discover the abject littleness of all terrestrial things. What is the earth, with all her ostentatious scenes, compared with this astonishingly grand furniture of the skies? What, but a dim speck, hardly perceivable in the map of the universe? It is observed by a very judicious writer,* that if the sun himself, which enlightens this part of the creation, was extinguished, and all the host of planetary worlds which move about him were annihilated, they would not be missed by an eye that can take in the whole compass of nature, any more than a grain of sand upon the sea-shore. The bulk of which they consist, and the space which they occupy,

* Spec. vol. viii. No. 565.

is so exceedingly little in comparison of the whole, that their loss would scarce leave a blank in the immensity of God's works. If then, not our globe only, but this whole system, be so very diminutive, what is a kingdom or a country? what are a few lordships, or the so much admired patrimonies of those who are styled wealthy!* When I measure them with my own little pittance, they swell into proud and bloated dimensions; but when I take the universe for my standard, how scanty is their size, how contemptible their figure! They shrink into pompous nothings.†

When the keen-eyed eagle soars above all the feathered race, and leaves their very sight below; when she wings her way with direct ascent, up the steep of heaven, and steadily gazing on the meridian sun, accounts its beaming splendours all her own; does she then regard, with any solicitude, the mote that is flying in the air, or the dust which she shook from her feet? And shall this eternal mind, which is capable of contemplating its Creator's glory; which is intended to enjoy the visions of his countenance; shall this eternal mind, endued with such great capacities, and made for such exalted ends, be so ignobly ambitious as to sigh for the tinsels of state; or so poorly covetous, as to grasp after ample territories on a needle's point? No! under the influence of such considerations I feel my sentiments expand, and my wishes acquire a turn of sublimity. My throbbing desires after worldly grandeur die away; and I find myself, if not possessed of power, yet superior to its charms. Too long, must I own, have my affections

* Juvat inter sidera vagantem divitum pavimenta ridere, et totam cum auro suo terram.—*Sen.*

† Terrellæ grandia inania.—*Watt' Hor. Lyr.*

been pinioned by vanity, and immured in this earthly clod. But these thoughts break the shackles. These objects open the door of liberty. My soul, fired by such noble prospects, weighs anchor from this little nook, and coasts no longer about its contracted shores, doats no longer on its painted shells. The immensity of things is her range, and an infinity of bliss is her aim.

Behold this immense expanse, and admire the condescension of thy God. In this manner, an inspired and princely astronomer approved his survey of the nocturnal heavens. When I consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained: I am smitten with wonder at thy glory, and cry out in a transport of gratitude, 'Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?'* 'How amazing, how charming, is that divine benignity, which is pleased to bow its sacred regards to so foolish and worthless a creature? yea, disdains not, from the height of infinite exaltation, to extend its kind providential care, to our most minute concerns! This is amazing; but that the Everlasting Sovereign should give his Son, to be made flesh, and become our Saviour! Shall I call it a miracle of condescending goodness? rather, what are all miracles, what are all mysteries, to this ineffable gift?'

Had the brightest archangel been commissioned to come down with the olive branch of peace in his hand, signifying his Eternal Maker's readiness to be reconciled; on our bended knees, with tears of joy, and a torrent of thankfulness, we ought to have received the transporting news; but when, instead of

* Psal. viii. 3, 4.

such an angelic envoy, he sends his only-begotten Son, his Son beyond all thought illustrious, to make us the gracious overture; sends him from the 'habitation of his holiness and glory,' to put on the infirmities of mortality, and dwell in a tabernacle of clay; sends him, not barely to make us a transient visit, but to abide many years in our inferior and miserable world; sends him, not to exercise dominion over monarchs, but to wear out his life in the ignoble form of a servant; and at last, to make his exit under the infamous character of a malefactor! Was ever love like this? Did ever grace stoop so low?* Should the sun be shorn of all his radiant honours, and degraded into a clod of the valleys; should all the dignitaries of heaven be deposed from their thrones, and degenerate

* This reminds me of a very noble piece of sacred oratory, where, in a fine series of the most beautiful gradations, the apostle displays the admirably condescending kindness of our Saviour. He thought it no robbery, it was his indisputable right, to be equal with the infinite self-existent, immortal God; yet, in mercy to sinners, he emptied himself of the incommunicable honours, and laid aside the robes of incomprehensible glory. When he entered upon his mediatorial state, instead of acting in the grand capacity of universal sovereign, he took upon him the form of a servant; and not the form of those ministering spirits whose duty is dignity itself; who are throned, though adoring. He took not on him the nature of angels, but stooped, incomparably lower; assumed a body of animated dust, and was made in the likeness of men, those inferior and depraved creatures. Astonishing condescension! but not sufficient for the overflowing richness of the Redeemer's love; for being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself farther still; occupied the lowest place, where all was low and ignoble. He not only submitted to the yoke of the law, but also bore the infirmities, and ministered to the necessities of mortals. He even washed the feet of others, and had not where to lay his own head. Yea, he carried his meritorious humiliation to the very deepest degrees of possible abasement. He became obedient unto death; and not to a common or natural death, but a death more infamous than the gibbet, more torturous than the rack: even the accursed death of the cross. *Phil.* ii. 6—8

into insects of a day; great, great would be the abasement; but nothing to thine, most blessed Jesus; nothing to thine, thou Prince of Peace; when for us men and for our salvation, thou didst not abhor the coarse accommodations of the manager, thou didst not decline even the gloomy horrors of the grave.

'Tis well the sacred oracles have given this doctrine the most explicit confirmation, and evidence quite incontestable, otherwise a favour so undeserved, so unexpected, and rich beyond all imagination, might stagger our belief. Could He, who launches all these planetary globes through the illimitable void, and leads them on, from age to age, in their extensive career; could he resign his hands, to be confined by the girding cord, and his back to be ploughed by the bloody scourge? Could He, who crowns all the stars with inextinguishable brightness, be himself defiled with spitting, and disfigured with the thorny scar? It is the greatest of wonders, and yet the surest of truths.

O! ye mighty orbs, that roll along the spaces of the sky; I wondered, a little while ago, at your vast dimensions, and ample circuit. But now my amazement ceases; or rather, it is entirely swallowed up by a much more stupendous subject. Methinks, your enormous bulk is shrivelled to an atom; your prodigious revolutions are contracted to a span; while I muse upon the far more elevated heights and unfathomable depths, the infinitely more extended lengths, and unlimited breadths, of this love of God in Christ Jesus.*

Contemplating this stately expanse, I see a mirror, which represents, in the most awful colours, the

* Eph. iii. 18, 19.

heinousness of human guilt. Ten thousand volumes, wrote on purpose to display the aggravations of my various acts of disobedience, could not so effectually convince me of their inconceivable enormity, as the consideration of that all-glorious Person; who, to make an atonement for them, spilt the last drop of his blood. I have sinned, may every child of Adam say; and what shall I do unto thee, O thou Observer of men?* Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? Vain commutation! and such as would be rejected by the blessed God with the utmost abhorrence. Will all the potentates, that sway the sceptre in a thousand kingdoms, devote their royal and honoured lives, to rescue an obnoxious creature from the stroke of vengeance? Alas! it must cost more, incomparably more, to expiate the malignity of sin, and save a guilty wretch from hell. Will all the principalities of heaven be content to assume my nature, and resign themselves to death for my pardon?† Even

* Job vii. 20.

† Milton sets this thought in a very poetical and striking light. All the sanctities of heaven stand round the throne of the Supreme Majesty. God foresees and foretels the fall of man; the ruin which will unavoidably ensue on his transgression; and the utter impossibility of his being able to extricate himself from the abyss of misery.

> He, with his whole posterity, must die:
> Die he or justice must: unless for him
> Some other able, and as willing, pay
> The rigid satisfaction, death for death.

After which affecting representation, intended to raise the most tender emotions of pity, the following inquiry is addressed to all the surrounding angels:

> Say, heavenly powers, where shall we find such love?
> Which of you will be mortal, to redeem
> Man's mortal crime! and die, the dead to save!

this would be too mean a satisfaction for inexorable justice; too scanty a reparation of God's injured honour. So flagrant is human guilt, that nothing but a victim of infinite dignity could constitute an adequate propitiation. He who said, 'Let there be light, and there was light;' Let there be a firmament, and immediately the blue curtains floated in the sky; he must take flesh; he must feel the fierce torments of crucifixion; and pour out his soul in agonies, if ever such transgressors are pardoned.

How vast is that debt which all the wealth of both the Indies cannot discharge. How vitiated that habit of body, which all the drugs produced by nature herself, cannot rectify! But how much more ruined was thy condition, O my soul! how much more heinous were thy crimes! since nothing less than the sufferings and death of Messiah, the Son of God, and radiant image of his glory, could effect thy recovery, or cancel thy iniquity. Though perhaps, thou art not sunk so very deep in pollution as some of the most abandoned profligates, yet remember the inestimable ransom paid to redeem thee from everlasting destruction. Remember this, and 'never open

> He asked; but all the heavenly choir stood mute,
> And silence was in heaven.

There is, to me at least, an inimitable spirit and beauty in the last circumstance—That such an innumerable multitude of generous and compassionate beings should be struck dumb with surprise and terror at the very mention of the deadly forfeiture and ransom set! No language is so eloquent as this silence. Words could not possibly have expressed, in so emphatical a manner, the dreadful nature of the task; the absolute inability of any or all creatures to execute it; the supereminent and matchless love of the eternal Son, in undertaking the tremendous work, not only without reluctance, but unsought and unimplored, with readiness, alacrity, and delight.—Paradise Lost, book iii. line 209, Edit. Bentl.

thy mouth any more,'* either to murmur at the divine chastisements, or to glory in thy own attainments. Remember this; and even 'loathe thyself† for the multitude of thy provocations,' and thy great baseness.

Once more; let me view this beautiful, this magnificent expanse, and conceive some juster apprehensions of the unknown richness of my Saviour's atonement. I am informed by a writer who cannot mistake, that the High-Priest of my profession, who was also the sacrifice for my sins, is higher than the heavens;‡ more exalted in dignity, more bright with glory, than all the heavenly mansions, and all their illustrious inhabitants. If my heart was humbled at the consideration of its excessive guilt, how do all my drooping powers revive at this delightful thought? The poor criminal, that seemed to be tottering on the very brink of the infernal pit, is raised, by such a belief, even to the portals of paradise. My self-abasement, I trust, will always continue; but my fears, under the influence of such a conviction, are quite gone. I do not, I cannot, doubt the efficacy of this propitiation. While I see a glimpse of its matchless excellency, and verily believe myself interested in its merits. I know not what it is to feel any misgiving suspicions; but am stedfast in faith, and joyful through hope.

Be my iniquities like debts of millions of talents, here is more than full payment for all that prodigious sum. Let the enemy of mankind, and accuser of the brethren, load me with invectives; this one plea—a divine Redeemer died—most thoroughly quashes every indictment. For, though there be much tur-

* Ezek. xvi. 63. † Ezek. xxxvi. 31. ‡ Heb. vii. 26.

pitude, and manifold transgressions, 'there is no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus.'—Nay, were I chargeable with all the vilest deeds which have been committed in every age of the world, by every nation of men; even in this most deplorable case, I need not sink into despair. Even such guilt, though grievous beyond all expression, is not to be compared with that abundance of grace and righteousness which dwell in the incarnate Divinity. How great, how transcendently glorious, are the perfections of the adored Jehovah! so great, so superlatively precious, is the expiation of the dying Jesus. 'Tis impossible for the human mind to exalt this atonement too highly;* 'tis impossible for the humble penitent to confide in it too steadily. The Scriptures, the Scriptures of eternal truth, have said it, (exult my soul in the belief of it!) that the blood on which we rely is God's own blood;† and therefore all-sufficient to expiate, omnipotent to save.

David, that egregious sinner, but more exemplary saint, seems to have been well acquainted with this comfortable truth. What else can be the import of that very remarkable, but most devout declaration, 'thou shalt purge me‡ with hyssop, and I shall be

* This doctrine, though rich with consolation to the ruined sinner, yet is it not likely to open a door for licentiousness, and embolden transgressors to prosecute their vices! No; it is the most powerful motive to that genuine repentance, which flows from an unfeigned love of God, and operates in a hearty detestation of all sin. One who knew the unmeasurable goodness of the Lord, and was no stranger to the sinful perverseness of our nature, says, 'There is mercy with thee, therefore shalt thou be feared;' Psal. cxxx. 4— words full to my purpose, which at once add the highest authority to this sentiment, and direct our minds to its proper influence and due improvement.

† Acts xx. 28.

‡ Psal. li. 7.

clean; thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.'—'I have been guilty, I must confess, of the most complicated and shocking crimes; crimes, inflamed by every aggravating circumstance, with regard to myself, my neighbour, and my God: myself, who have been blessed above men, and the distinguished favourite of Providence; my neighbour, who, in the most dear and tender interests, has been irreparably injured; my God, who might justly expect the most grateful returns of duty, instead of such enormous violations of his law. Yet, all horrid and execrable as my offence is, it is nothing to the superabundant merit of that great Redeemer, who was promised from the foundation of the world; in whom all my fathers trusted; who is the hope of all the ends of the earth. Though my conscience be more loathsome with adulterous impurity than the dunghill; though treachery and murder have rendered it even black as the gloom of hell; yet, washed in the 'fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,'* I shall be, I say not, pure only—this were a disparagement to the efficacy of my Saviour's death; but I shall be fair as the lily, and white as the snow. Nay, let me not derogate from the glorious object of my confidence; cleansed by this sovereign sanctifying stream, I shall be fairer than the full-blown lily, whiter than the new-fallen snows.'

Power, saith the Scripture, belongeth unto God.† And in what majestic lines is this attribute of Jehovah written, throughout the whole volume of the Creation? especially through those magnificent pages, unfolded in yonder starry regions; which are therefore styled, by the sweet and seraphic singer of Israel, 'the

* Zeck xiii. 1. † Psal. lxii. 11.

firmament of his power;* because the grand exploits of Omnipotence are there displayed with the utmost pomp, and recorded in the most legible characters.

Who, that looks upwards to the midnight sky; and, with an eye of reason, beholds its rolling wonders; who can forbear inquiring, Of what were those mighty orbs formed? Amazing to relate! they were produced without materials; they sprung from emptiness itself: the stately fabric of universal nature emerged out of nothing. What instruments were used by the Supreme Architect, to fashion the parts with such exquisite niceness, and give so beautiful a polish to the whole? How was all connected into one finely-proportioned and nobly-finished structure? A bare fiat accomplished all. 'Let them be,' said God. He added no more; and immediately the marvellous edifice arose, adorned with every beauty, displaying innumerable perfections, and declaring, amidst enraptured seraphs, its great Creator's praise. 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.' What forceful machinery fixed some of those ponderous globes on an immoveable basis? What irresistible impulse bowled others through the circuit of the heavens? What coercive energy confined their impetuous courses within limits astonishingly large, yet most minutely true? Nothing but his sovereign will. For all things were at first constituted, and all to this day abide, 'according to his ordinance.'

Without any toilsome assiduity or laborious process to raise, to touch, to speak such a multitude of immense bodies into being; to launch them through the spaces of the sky, as an arrow from the hand of

* Psal. cl. 1.

a giant; to impress on such unwieldy masses a motion far outstripping the swiftness of the winged creation,* and to continue them in the same rapid whirl for thousands and thousands of years—What an amazing instance of infinite might is this! Can any thing be impossible to the Lord, the Lord God, the Creator and Controller of all the ends of the earth, all the regions of the universe? Rather, is not all that we count difficult, perfect ease to that glorious Being, who only spake and the world was made?† Who only gave command, and the stupendous axle was lodged fast, the lofty wheels moved complete? What a sure defence, O my soul, is this everlasting strength of thy God! Be this thy continual refuge in the article of danger, this thy never-failing resource in every time of need.

What cannot this uncontrollable power of the great Jehovah effect for his people? Be their miseries ever so galling, cannot this God relieve them? Be their wants ever so numerous, cannot this God supply them? Be their corruptions within ever so inveterate, or their temptations without ever so importunate, cannot this mighty, mighty God subdue the former,

* To give one instance of this remark. The earth, in the diurnal revolution which it performs on its own axis, whirls about at the rate of a thousand miles an hour. And as the great orbit, which it describes annually round the sun, is reckoned at 540 millions of miles, it must travel near a million and a half each day. What a force must be requisite to protude so vast a globe, and wheel it on, loaded as it is with huge mountains and ponderous rocks, at such a prodigious degree of rapidity! It surpasses human conception! How natural, how pertinent, how almost necessary, after such an observation, is the acknowledgment made by holy Job: 'I know that thou canst do every thing; and that no thought,' no imaginable scheme, 'can be withholden from thee,' can lie beyond thy power to execute. Chap. xlii. 2.

† Psal. xxxiii. 9.

and fortify them against the latter? Should trials, with an incessant vehemence, sift thee as wheat; should tribulation, with a weight of woes, almost grind thee to powder; should pleasure, with her bewitching smiles solicit thee to delicious ruin; yet 'hold thee fast by God,' and lay thy help upon him that is omnipotent. Thou canst not be involved in such calamitous circumstances, or exposed to such imminent peril, but thy God, whom thou servest, is able to deliver thee from the one, and to support thee under the other. To support! to deliver! Let me not dishonour the unlimited greatness of his power. He is able to exalt thee, from the deepest distress, to the most triumphant joy; and to make even a complication of evils work together for thy everlasting good. He is able, not only to accomplish what I have been speaking, but to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.

O! the wretched condition of the wicked, who have this Lord of all power for their enemy! O! the desperate madness of the ungodly, who provoke the Almighty to jealously! Besotted creatures! are you able to contend with your Maker, and enter the lists against incensed Omnipotence? Can you bear the fierceness of his wrath, or sustain the vengeance of his lifted arm? At his presence, though awfully serene, the hills melt like wax, and the 'mountains skip like frighted lambs.' At the least intimation of his displeasure, the foundations of nature rock, and the 'pillars of heaven tremble.' How then can a withered leaf endure, when 'his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire?' Or can any thing screen a guilty worm, when the great and terrible God shall whet his glittering sword, and his hand take hold on

inexorable judgment? When that hand, which shoots the planets, masses of excessive bulk,* with such surprising rapidity through the sky; that hand, which darts the comets to such unmeasurable distances, beyond the orbit of our remotest planet, beyond the pursuit of the strongest eye: when that hand is stretched out to punish, can the munition of rocks, the intervention of seas, or even interposing worlds, divert the blow? Consider this, Ambition; and bow thy haughty crest. Consider this, Disobedience, and bend thy iron sinew. O! consider this, all ye that forget or affront the tremendous Jehovah. He can, by a single act of his will, lay the universe in utter ruin; and can he want power to bring you, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, to the dust of death, or to the flames of hell? He has, I say not, ten thousand lightnings to scorch you to ashes; ten thousand thunders to crush you into atoms; but, what is unspeakably more dreadful, he has an army of terrors, even in the look of his angry countenance. His very frown is worse than destruction.

I cannot dismiss this subject without admiring the patience of the blessed God; who, though so strong and powerful, yet 'is provoked every day.' Surely, as is his majesty, so is his mercy; his pity altogether commensurate to his power. If I vilify but the name of an earthly monarch, I lose my liberty, and am

* One of the planets (Saturn) is supposed to be more than ninety times as big as the globe on which we live. According to the same calculation, the largest of the planets (Jupiter) is above two hundred times vaster than this vast collection of spacious forests, towering mountains, extensive continents, and boundless oceans. Such enormous magnitude, winged with such prodigious speed! it raises astonishment beyond expression—With God is terrible majesty!—Job xxxvii. 22. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? Rev. xv. 4.

confined to the dungeon. If I appear in arms, and draw the sword against my national sovereign, my life is forfeited, and my very blood will scarce atone for the crime. But thee I have dishonoured, O! thou King immortal and invisible! Against thee my breast has fomented secret disaffection; my behaviour has risen up in open rebellion; and yet I am spared, yet I am preserved. Instead of being banished from thy presence, I sit at thy table, and am fed from thy hand. Instead of pursuing me with thunderbolts of vengeance, thy favours surround me on every side. That arm, that injured arm, which might justly fall, with irretrievable ruin, on a traitor's head, is most graciously stretched out to caress him with the tenderest endearments, to cherish him with every instance of parental kindness. O! thou mightiest, thou best of beings, how am I pained at my very soul for such shameful and odious disingenuity! Let me always abominate myself as the basest of creatures, but adore that unwearied long-suffering of thine, which refuses to be irritated; love that unremitted goodness, which no acts of ingratitude could stop, or so much as check, in its gracious current. O! let this stubborn heart, which duty could not bind, which threatenings could not awe, be the captive, the willing captive, of such triumphant beneficence.

I have often been struck with wonder at that Almighty skill, which weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance; which proportioned the waters in the hollow of its hand, and adjusted the dust of the earth* by a measure. But how much

* Isai. xl. 12. The dust of the earth, in this sublime Scripture, signifies the dry land, or solid part of our globe; which

more marvellous is that magnificent economy which poised the stars with inexpressible nicety, and meted out the heavens with a span! where all is prodigiously vast, immensely various, and yet more than mathematically exact. Surely, the wisdom of God manifests itself in the skies, and shines in those lucid orbs; shines on the contemplative mind, with a lustre incomparably brighter than that which their united splendours transmit to the eye.

Behold yonder countless multitude of globes; consider their amazing magnitude; regard them as the sovereigns of so many systems, each accompanied with his planetary equipage. Upon this supposition, what a multiplicity of mighty spheres must be perpetually running their rounds in the upper regions! yet none mistake their way, or wander from the goal, though they pass through trackless and unbounded fields. None fly off from their orbits into extravagant excursions; none press in upon their centre with too near an approach. None interfere with

is placed in contradistinction to the whole collection of fluid matter, mentioned in the preceding clause. Perhaps this remarkable expression may be intended to intimate, not only the extreme niceness which stated the dimensions of the world in general, or in the gross: but also that particular exactness, with which the very smallest materials that constitute its frame (not excepting each individual atom), were calculated and disposed.—q. d. 'Tis a small thing to say, no such enormous redundancies, as unnecessary ridges of mountains, were suffered to subsist. There was not so much as the least grain of sand superfluous, or a single particle of dust deficient. As the grand aim of the description is, to celebrate the consummate wisdom exemplified in the creation, and to display that perfect proportion with which every part tallies, coincides, and harmonizes with the whole. I have taken leave to alter the word of our English translators 'comprehend,' and introduce in its stead a term which is faithful to the Hebrew, and more significative of the author's precise idea.

each other in their perennial passage, or intercept the kindly communications of another's influence;* but all their rotations proceed in eternal harmony, keeping such time, and observing such laws, as are most exquisitely adapted to the perfection of the whole.

While I contemplate this 'excellent wisdom which made the heavens,' and attunes all their motions, how am I abashed at that mixture of arrogance and folly, which has at any time inclined me to murmur at thy dispensations, O Lord! What is this, but a sort of implicit treason against thy supremacy, and a tacit denial of thy infinite understanding? Hast thou so regularly placed such a wonderful diversity of systems through the spaces of the universe? Didst thou, without any probationary essays, without any improving re-touches, speak them into the most consummate perfection? Dost thou continually superintend all their circumstances with a sagacity that never mistakes the minutest tittle of propriety? And shall I be so unaccountably stupid as to question the justness of thy discernment, in 'choosing my inheritance, and fixing the bounds of my habitation?' Not a single erratum in modelling the structure, determining the distance,† and conducting the career of unnumbered worlds! and shall my peevish hu-

* The interception of light, by means of an eclipse, happens very rarely; and then is of so short a continuance, as not to be at all inconvenient: nay, it is attended with such circumstances as render it rather useful than prejudicial.

† The sun in particular (and let this serve as a specimen of that most curious exactness with which the other celestial bodies are constituted, and all their circumstances regulated), the sun is formed of such a determinate magnitude, and placed at such a convenient distance, 'as not to annoy, but only refresh us, and nourish the ground with its kindly warmth. If it were larger, it would set the earth on fire; if smaller, it would

mour presume to censure thy interposition with regard to the affairs of one inconsiderable creature, whose stature, in such a comparative view, is less than a span, and his present duration little more than a moment?

O! thou God, 'in whose hand my breath is, and whose are all my ways,' let such sentiments as now possess my thoughts be always lively on my heart! These shall compose my mind into a cheerful acquiescence and a thankful submission, even when afflictions gall the sense, or disappointments break my schemes. Then shall I, like the grateful patriarch,* in all the changes of my condition, and even in the depths of distress, erect an altar of adoring resignation, and inscribe it with the apostle's motto, 'To God only wise.' Then shouldst thou give me leave to be the carver of my own fortunes, I would humbly desire to relinquish the grant, and recommit the disposal of myself to thy unerring beneficence; fully persuaded that thy counsels, though contrary to my froward inclinations, or even afflictive to my flesh, are incomparably more eligible than the blind impulse of my own will, however soothing to animal nature.

On a careless inspection, you perceive no accuracy or uniformity in the position of the heavenly bodies. They appear like an illustrious chaos, a promiscuous heap of shining globes; neither ranked in order, nor moving by line. But what seems confusion is all regularity; what carries a show of negligence, is

leave it frozen; if it was nearer us, we should be scorched to death; if farther from us, we should not be able to live for want of heat.'—*Stackhouse's History of the Bible.*

* See Gen. xii. 7, 8.

really the result of the most masterly contrivance. You think, perhaps, they rove in their aërial flight; but they rove by the nicest rule and without the least error. Their circuits, though seemingly devious; their mazes, though intricate to our apprehensions; are marked out, not indeed with golden compasses, but by the infinitely more exact determinations of the all-wise Spirit.

So, what wears the appearance of calamity in the allotments appointed for the godly, has really the nature of a blessing. It issues from fatherly love, and will terminate in the richest good. If Joseph is snatched from the embraces of an indulgent parent, and abandoned to slavery in a foreign land; it is in order to save the holy family from perishing by famine, and to preserve 'the seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.' If he falls into the deepest disgrace, it is on purpose that he may rise to the highest honours. Even the confinement of the prison, by the unsearchable workings of Providence, opens his way to the right hand of the throne itself. Let the most afflicted servant of Jesus wait the final upshot of things. He will then discover the apparent expediency of all those tribulations, which now, perhaps, he can hardly admit without reluctance, or suffer without some struggles of dissatisfaction. Then the gushing tear and the heaving sigh will be turned into tides of gratitude and hymns of holy wonder.

In the mean time, let no audacious railer presumptuously impeach the divine procedure; but, adoring where we cannot comprehend, let us expect the evolution of the mysterious plan. Then shall every eye perceive, that the seeming labyrinths of Providence

were the most direct and compendious way to effect his general purposes of grace, and to bring about each one's particular happiness. Then, also, shall it be clearly shown, in the presence of applauding worlds, why virtue pined in want, while vice rioted in affluence; why amiable innocence so often dragged the dungeon chain, while horrid guilt trailed the robe of state. That day of universal audit, that day of everlasting retribution, will not only vindicate but magnify the whole management of Heaven. The august sessions shall close with this unanimous, this glorious acknowledgment: 'Though clouds and darkness, impenetrable by any human scrutiny, were sometimes round about the Supreme Conductor of things, yet righteousness and judgment were the constant habitation of his seat,* the invariable standard of all his administrations.' Thus (if I may illustrate the grandest truths by inferior occurrences), while we view the arras on the side of least distinction, it is void of any elegant fancy, without any nice strokes of art, nothing but a confused jumble of incoherent threads. No sooner is the piece beheld in its proper aspect, but the suspected rudeness vanishes, and the most curious arrangement takes place. We are charmed with designs of the finest taste, and figures of the most graceful form: all is shaped with symmetry, all is clad in beauty.

The goodness of God is most eminently displayed in the skies. Could we take an understanding survey of whatever is formed by the Divine Architect, throughout the whole extent of material things, our minds would be transported with their excellencies, and our tongues echo back that great encomium,

* Psal. xcvii. 2.

They are 'good, very good :* most beautiful in themselves; contrived by unerring wisdom, and executed with inimitable skill: most useful in their functions, exactly fitting the places they fill, and completely answering the purposes for which they were intended! All the parts of the inanimate creation proclaim, both by their intrinsic and relative excellencies, the all-diffusive beneficence of their Maker.

How much more wonderful are the displays of divine indulgence in the worlds of life! Because dead matter is incapable of delight, therefore the gracious Creator has raised innumerable ranks of perceptive existence; such as are qualified to taste his bounty, and enjoy each a happiness suited to its peculiar state. With this view, he furnished the regions of inferior nature with an order and a series of sensitive beings. The waters teem with shoals of finny inhabitants; the dry land swarms with animals of every order: the dwellings of the firmament are occupied by multitudes of winged people; not so much as a green leaf, philosophers say, but lodges and accommodates its puny animalcule tenants,†

* Gen. i. 31.

† A very celebrated poet, in a beautiful paragraph on this subject, informs his readers, that all nature swarms with life. In subterranean cells, the earth heaves with vital motion: even the hard stone, in the very inmost recesses of its impenetrable citadel, holds multitudes of animated inhabitants. The pulp of mellow fruit, and all the productions of the orchard, feed the invisible nations. Each liquid, whether of acid taste or milder relish, abounds with various forms of sensitive existence. Nor is the pure stream, or transparent air, without their colonies of unseen people. In which constitution of things we have a wonderful instance, not only of the divine goodness to those minute beings, in giving them a capacity for animal gratifications, but of his tender care for mankind in making them imperceptible to our senses.

And wherefore this diversity, this profusion of living creatures, flying the air, treading the ground, and gliding through the paths of the sea? For this most glorious reason,—that the eternal Sovereign may exercise his superabundant goodness; that his table may be furnished with millions and millions of guests; that he may fill, every hour, every moment, their mouths with food, or their hearts with gladness.

But what a small theatre are three or four elements for the operations of Jehovah's bounty! His magnificent liberality scorns such scanty limits. If you ask, wherefore has he created all worlds, and replenished them with an unknown multiplicity of beings, rising one above another in an endless gradation of still richer endowments, and still nobler capacities? The answer is,—for the manifestation of his own glory, and especially for the communication of his inexhaustible beneficence.* The great Creator could propose no advantage to himself; his bliss is incapable of any addition. 'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the

——— These, conceal'd
By the kind art of forming Heav'n, escape
The grosser eye of man: for, if the worlds
In worlds enclosed should on his senses burst,
From cates ambrosial and the nectar'd bowl
He'd turn abhorrent; and in dead of night,
When silence sleeps o'er all, be stunn'd with noise.
Thomson's Summer.

* A sacred writer, considering this delightful subject, and confining his observations within the narrow limits of his own country, cries out, with a mixture of amazement and gratitude, 'How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!' Who then can forbear being lost in wonder, and transported with delight, when he extends his survey to those infinitely more copious communications of divine bounty, which, like salutary and refreshing streams, run through all worlds, and make, not only the little valleys of a single kingdom, but the immensity of creation, laugh and sing! Zech. ix. 17.

world were made,' he was supremely happy in his own independent and all sufficient self. His grand design, therefore, in erecting so many stately fabrics, and peopling them with so many tribes of inhahabitants, was to transfuse his exuberant kindness, and impart felicity in all its forms. Ten thousand worlds, stocked with ten thousand times ten thousand ranks of sensitive and intelligent existence, are so many spacious gardens, which, with rivers of communicated joy, this ever-flowing fountain waters continually.

Boundless,* and (which raises our idea of this divine principle to the very highest degree of perfection) disinterested* munificence! How inexpressibly amiable is the blessed God, considered in this charming light! Is it possible to conceive any excellence so adorable and lovely, as infinite benevolence, guided by unerring wisdom, and exerting Almighty power, on purpose to make a whole universe happy! O my soul, what an irresistible attractive is here! What a most worthy object for thy most fervent affection! Shall now every glittering toy become a rival to this transcendently beneficient Being, and rob him of thy heart? No. Let his all-creating arm teach thee to trust in the fulness of his sufficiency; let his all-superintending eye incline thee to acquiesce in the dispensations of his providence; and let his bounty, so freely vouchsafed, so amply diffused, induce thee to love him with all the ardour of a grateful and admiring soul; induce thee

* * In this sense, 'There is none good but one, that is God;' none universally and essentially good; none, whose goodness extends itse f in an infinite variety of blessings to every capable object; or, who always dispenses his favours, from the sole principle of free and disinterested benevolence.

to serve him, not with a joyless awe, or slavish dread, but with unfeigned alacrity, and a delightful complacency.

If the goodness of God is so admirably seen in the works of nature, and the favours of providence; with what a noble superiority does it even triumph, in the mystery of redemption! Redemption is the brightest mirror, in which to contemplate this most lovely attribute of the Deity. Other gifts are only as mites from the divine treasury; but redemption opens, I had almost said exhausts, all the stores of indulgence and grace. Herein, 'God commandeth his love;* not only manifests, but sets it off, as it were, with every bright and grand embellishment; manifests it in so stupendous a manner, that it is beyond parallel, beyond thought, 'above all blessing and praise.' Was he not thy Son, everlasting God, thy only Son; the Son of thy bosom from eternal ages; the highest object of thy complacential delight? Was not thy love to this adorable Son, incomparably greater than the tenderest affection of any, or the united affections of all, mortal parents? Was not the blessed Jesus more illustrious in excellency than all angels; more exalted in dignity than all heavens? Yet didst thou resign him for poor mortals; for vile sinners! Couldst thou see him descend from his royal throne, and take up his abode in the sordid stable? See him forego the homage of the Seraphim, and stand exposed to the reproachful indignities of an insolent rabble? See him arraigned at the bar, and sentenced to death; numbered with malefactors and nailed to the gibbet; bathed in his own innocent blood, and pouring out his soul in

* Rom. v. 8.

agonies of sorrow? Could the Father, the Father himself, with unknown philanthropy,* say, 'It shall, it shall be so! My pity to rebellious man pleads, and prevails. Awake, therefore, O sword,† edged with divine wrath. Awake, and be sheathed in that immaculate breast; pierce that dearly beloved heart. I am content, that my Son endure the sharpness of death, rather than sinful mortals perish for ever.' Incomprehensible love! May it henceforward be the favorite subject of my meditation; more delightful to my musing mind than applause to the ambitious ear! May it be the darling theme of my discourse; sweeter to my tongue than the droppings of the honeycomb to my taste! May it be my choicest comfort through all the changes of life; and my reviving cordial, even in the last extremities of dissolution itself!

A prophet, contemplating with a distant survey this unexampled instance of Almighty love, is rapt into a transport of devotion. At a loss for proper acknowledgments, he calls upon the whole universe to aid his labouring breast, and supply his lack of praise. Sing melodiously, ye vaulted heavens; exult, and even leap for gladness, thou cumbrous earth; ye mountains, break your long silence; and burst into peals of loudest acclammation;‡ for the Lord, by this precious gift, and this great salvation hath comforted his people. A sacred historian hath left it upon record, that, at the first exhibition of this ravishing scene, there was, with the angel, who brought the blessed tidings, a multitude of the heavenly host; praising God, and making the concave

* Philanthrophy; that is loving-kindness to man.
† Zech. xiii. 7. ‡ Isai. xlix. 13.

of the skies resound with their hallelujahs. At the dawn of the Sun of Righteousness, when he was beginning to rise with healing in his wings, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. And shall man, whom this gracious dispensation principally respects; shall man, who is the centre of all these gladdening rays; shall he have no heart to adore, no anthem to declare, this

Love without end, and without measure grace.—*Milt.*

How pure is the state of the sky, and how clear its aspect! clearer than the limpid stream; purer than the transparent crystal; and more curiously fine than the polished mirror. That stately ceiling, fretted with gold, and stretched to an extent of many millions of leagues, is not disfigured with a single flaw. That azure canopy, embroidered with stars, and spacious enough to form a covering for unnumbered worlds, is without the least spot or wrinkle. Yet this, even this, will scarce yield us so much as a faint representation of the divine purity. God is a God of matchless and transcendant excellency; his ways are uprightness itself; his counsels and words are the very sanctity of wisdom and of truth. The laws which he has given to universal nature, are exquisitely contrived, and beyond all possibility of improvement. The precepts which he has appointed for the human race, are a complete summary of all that is honourable in itself, and perfective of the rational mind. Not the least oversight, in planning a series of events for all futurity; not the least maladministration in managing the affairs of every age, since time began, and of every nation under the whole heavens. Pardon these disparaging expres-

sions. A negative perfection is far, far beneath thy dignity, O thou most Highest. In all these instances in all thy acts, and all thy attributes, thou art not only holy, but glorious in holiness.'

So inconceivably holy is the Lord God of Hosts, that he sees defilement even in the brightness of the firmament; the living sapphire in the heavens, before his majesty, loses its lustre; yea, the stars, (though the most pure and resplendent part of the heavens) are not pure in his sight, How much less man, who in his fallen and depraved state, is but as a worm that crawls in the corrupted carcase; and the son of man, who, by reason of his manifold actual impurities, is too justly compared to an insect that wallows amid stench and putrefaction? Is there not then abundant cause, for the most irreproachable and eminent of mankind to renounce all arrogant pretensions, to lay aside every assuming air, to take nothing but shame and confusion to themselves! A holy prophet, and a holy prince, felt such humbling impressions, from a glimpse of the uncreated purity. I abhor myself in dust and ashes*, was the declaration of the one: I am a man of unclean lips†, the confession of the other. Should not this teach us all to adore the divine mercies, for that precious purifying fountain,‡ which was foretold from the foundation of the world, but was opened at that awful juncture, when knotty whips tore the flesh, when ragged thorns mangled the temples, when sharpened nails cut fresh sluices for the crimson current, when the gash of the spear completed the dreadful

* Job. xliii. 6. † Isa. iv. 5.

‡ In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness. Zech. xiii. 1

work, and forthwith flowed there, from the wounded heart, blood and water?

Especially, since God himself saw no blemish in his dear Son. He looketh to the moon, and it shineth not; yet his all-penetrating and jealous eye discerned nothing amiss, nothing defective, in our glorious Redeemer. Nothing amiss? He bore this illustrious testimony concerning his holy child Jesus: 'In him I am pleased; I am well pleased; I acquiesce, with entire complacency, and with the highest delight, in his person, his undertaking, and the whole execution of his office.' How should this thought enliven our hopes, while the other mortifies our pride! Should not our hearts spring within us, and even leap for joy, at the repeated assurance given us by revelation, that such a divinely excellent person is our Mediator? What apparent reason has every believer to adopt the blessed Virgin's exclamation! 'My soul doth magnify the Lord for his transcendent mercy; and my spirit rejoices, not in wide-extended harvests, waving over my fertile glebe,* not in armies vanquished, and leaving the peculiar treasure of nations for my spoil,* but in an infinitely richer, nobler blessing, even in God my Saviour:' that a person so sublime and perfect, has vouchsafed to become my surety: to give himself for my ransom, in the world below, and act as my advocate in the royal presence above; yea, to make my recovery the reward of his sufferings; my final felicity the honour of his mediatorial kingdom!

* * The inspired penman, from these two occasions of distinguished joy, sets forth the incomparably greater delight, which arises from the gift of a Saviour, and the blessing of redemption. Isaiah ix. ver. 3, compared with ver. 6.

When an innumerable multitude* of bodies, many of them more than a hundred thousand miles in diameter,† are all set in motion; when the orbits, in which they perform their periodical revolutions, are extended at the rate of several hundreds of millions; when each has a distinct and separate sphere for finishing his vast circuit; when no one knows what it is to be cramped, but each most freely expatiates in his unbounded career; when every one is placed at such an immense remove from each other, that they appear to their respective inhabitants only as so many spots of light: how astonishing must be the expanse, which yields room for all those mighty globes, and their widely-diffused operations! To what prodigious lengths did the Almighty Builder stretch his line, when he marked out the stupendous platform! I wonder at such an immeasurable extent! my very thoughts are lost in this abyss of space; but, be it known to mortals, be it never forgot by sinners, that, in all its most surprising amplitude, it is small, it is scanty, compared with the bounty, and the mercy of its Maker.

His bounty is absolutely without limits,‡ and with-

* This refers not only to the planets which pass and repass about our sun, but also to the other planetary worlds, which are supposed to attend the several fixed stars.

† The diameter of Jupiter is calculated at 130,650 miles, while his orbit is reckoned to consist of 895,134,000; which computation, according to the maxims of astronomy, and the laws of proportion, may, as is taken for granted in the Contemplations, be applied to other planets revolving round other suns.

‡ By bounty, I mean, not the actual exercise, or the sensible effects of this excellency in the Deity: these are, and always must be, through the immense perfection of the attribute, and the necessary scantiness of the recipient, bounded. But I would be understood, as speaking of the divine power, and the divine will, to exert divine beneficence. These can have

out end. The most lavish generosity cannot exhaust or even diminish his munificence. O! all ye tribes of men; or rather, all ye classes of intelligent creatures; ye are not straitened in the liberality of your ever-blessed Creator; be not straitened in your own expectations. 'Open your mouth wide, and he shall fill it,' with copious and continual draughts from the cup of joy. Your God, on whom is your whole dependence, is more than able, is more than willing, to 'supply all your need according to his riches in glory.' When the Lord Jehovah is the giver, and his grace* the gift; let your wishes be unbounded, and your cravings unsatiable. All that created beings can possibly covet, is but a very small pittance of that unknown happiness, which the everlasting Benefactor is ready to bestow. Suppose every charitable disposition, which warms the hearts of the human race, added to those more enlarged affections which glow in heavenly bosoms; what were they all, even in their highest exercise, compared with the benignity of the Divine Nature? Bless me then, thou Eternal Source of love; bless all that reverence thy holy name, according to thy own most profuse goodness; whose great prerogative it is, to disdain all measure.

no real, no imaginable limits. These, after a profusion of blessings, distributed to unnumbered worlds, continued through unnumbered ages, must still have more to bestow, for ever have more to bestow, infinitely more to bestow, than it is possible for creation itself to receive.

* 2 Cor. ix. 8. 'God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.' How beautiful and emphatical is this description! inferior to nothing, but that extent of ability, and those riches of liberality, which it so eloquently celebrates. Does it not exhaust all the powers of language, while it attempts to give us a specimen of the munificence of the Lord?

O! bless us, in proportion to that grace; the richness of which (unutterable by the tongues of men, and of angels) was once spoken in the groans, and written in the wounds of thy expiring Son!

Spacious indeed are these heavens! Where do they begin? Where do they end? What is their extent? Can angels answer my question? Have angels travelled the vast circuit? Can angels measure the bounds of space? No; 'tis boundless, 'tis unknown, 'tis amazing all. How charming then to reflect, that the mercy of God is 'greater than the heavens;' is more extensive than the dimensions of the sky. Transporting reflection! Let me indulge thee once more. Let me think over the delightful displays of this lovely attribute; and, while I admire the trophies of forgiving goodness, add one to the number. With what amiable and affecting colours is this represented in the parable of the prodigal! What could induce that foolish youth to forsake his father's house? Had he not been tenderly cherished by the good parent, and loaded with benefits from his indulgent hand? Were not the restraints of parental government an easy yoke; or rather, a preservative from ruin? Notwithstanding every endearing obligation, he revolts from his duty, and launches into such scandalous irregularities, as were dishonourable to his family, and destructive to himself. When necessity, not choice, but sharp necessity, drove him to a submissive return; does the injured father stand aloof, or shut his doors? Quite the reverse. He espies him while he is yet a great way off, and the moment he beholds the profligate youth, he has compassion on him; his bowels yearn; they 'sound like an harp,' touched with notes divinely soft. He never

once thinks of his ungracious department and infamous debaucheries. Pity, parental pity, passes an act of oblivion; and, in one instant cancels a series of long continued provocations. So strong are the workings of fatherly affection, that he is almost impatient to embrace the naked and destitute wretch. The son's pace is slow; he arose and came: the father is swift, he sprung forth (aged as he was) and ran. And is there a single frown in his brow, or one upbraiding word on his tongue? Instead of loathing the sordid creature, or reproaching him for his odious excesses, he falls on his neck, clasps him in his arms, and hugs him to his bosom. Instead of disowning the riotous spendthrift, or rejecting him for his undutiful behaviour, he receives and welcomes him with kisses of delight; he rejoices at his return from extravagance and vice, as he formerly rejoiced on the day of his nativity. When this companion of harlots opens his mouth, before he speaks, the father hears. He interrupts him, in the midst of his intended speech; the overflowings of his compassionate heart can brook no delay; he seems to be uneasy himself, till he has made the afflicted penitent glad with the assurance of his acceptance, and the choicest of his favours; while the poor abashed offender seeks nothing more than not to be abhorred, he is thoroughly reconciled, and honoured before the whole family; while he requests no other indulgence, than only to be treated as the meanest servant, he is clothed with the best robe, he is feasted with the fatted calf, he is caressed as the dearest of children. Was there ever so bright and winning a picture of the tenderest mercy, most freely vouchsafed, even to the most unworthy of creatures? Yet thus, my soul; and thus, my fellow-sinner; will

the Lord God of everlasting compassions receive us; if, sensible of our misery, and thirsting for salvation, we turn to him through Jesus Christ.

Where sin has abounded, says the proclamation from the court of heaven, grace doth much more abound. Manasseh was a monster of barbarity, for he caused his own children to pass through the fire, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. Manasseh was an adept in iniquity; for he not only multiplied, and to an extravagant degree, his own sacrilegious impieties, but he poisoned the principles, and perverted the manners of his subjects, making them to do worse than the most detestable of the heathen idolaters.* Yet, through this superabundant grace, he is humbled, he is reformed, and becomes a child of forgiving love, an heir of immortal glory. Behold that bitter and bloody persecutor Saul; when, breathing out threatenings, and bent upon slaughter, he worried the lambs, and put to death the disciples of Jesus; who, upon the principles of human judgment, would not have pronounced him a vessel of wrath, destined to unavoidable damnation; nay, would not have been ready to conclude, that, if there were heavier chains, and a deeper dungeon, in the world of woe: they must surely be reserved for such an implacable enemy of true godliness? Yet (admire and adore the inexhaustible treasure of grace!) this Saul is admitted into the goodly fellowship of the prophets, is numbered with the noble army of martyrs, and makes a distinguished figure among the glorious company of the apostles. The Corinthians were flagitious even to a proverb. Some of them wallowed in such abominable vices, and habituated themselves

* See 2 Chron. xxxiii. † Acts ix. 1.

to such outrageous acts of injustice, as were a reproach to human nature. Yet even these sons of violence, and slaves of sensuality, 'were washed, were sanctified, were justified:'* washed, in the precious blood of a dying Redeemer; sanctified, by the powerful operations of his blessed Spirit; justified, through the infinitely tender mercies of a gracious God. Those who were once the burden of the earth, are now the joy of heaven, and the delight of angels.

There is another instance in Scripture, which most loudly publishes that sweetest of the divine names, 'the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin:'† an instance this, which exceeds all the former; which exceeds whatever can be imagined; which, if I were to forget, the very stones might cry out, and sound it in my ears. I mean the case of those sinners, who murdered the Prince of Peace, and Lord of Glory. These men could scarce have the shadow of an excuse for their crime; hardly a circumstance to extenuate their guilt. They were well acquainted with his exemplary conversation; they had often heard his heavenly doctrines; they were almost daily spectators of his unequalled miracles. They therefore had all possible reason to honour him, as the most illustrious of Beings; and to receive his gospel, as the most inestimable of blessings. Yet, notwithstanding all these engaging motives to love him, even above their own lives; they seize his person, asperse his character, drag him before a heathen tribunal, and extort a sentence of death against innocence and holiness itself. Never was the vilest

* 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. † Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

slave so contumeliously abused, nor the most execrable malefactor so barbarously executed. The sun was confounded at the shocking scene; and one cannot but wonder, how the avenging lightnings could withhold their flashes. The earth trembled at the horrid deed; and why, why did it not cleave asunder, and open the passage for such blood-thirsty miscreants, into the nethermost hell? Shall these ever hope to obtain forgiveness from the righteous Judge? Shall not these be consigned over to inexorable wrath, and the severest torments? O the miraculous effects of divine grace! O the triumphant goodness of God our Saviour! Many, even of these impious wretches, at the descent of the Holy Ghost, were convinced of their miserable state; were wounded with penitential remorse; fled to the sanctuary of the cross; had their pardon ratified by the baptismal seal; and, continuing in the apostles' doctrine, were made partakers of the kingdom of heaven; where they now shine, as so many everlasting monuments of most distinguished mercy; and receive beatitude past utterance, from that very Redeemer, whom once 'with wicked hands, they crucified and slew.'

Well might the prophet cry out, with a pleasing amazement; 'who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by transgression?'* Let all flesh know assuredly; let all flesh rejoice greatly; that with the Lord there is such mercy, and with his Christ such plentiful redemption. And O! for the voice of an archangel, to circulate the glad tidings through the universe; that the American savage, as well as the European sage, may learn the exceeding riches of grace in Christ; through whose infinitely

* Mic. vii. 18.

satisfying propitiation, all manner of sin, barbarity, and blasphemy, are freely forgiven unto men.

What a grand and majestic dome is the sky! Where are the pillars which support the stately concave? What art, most exactly true, balances the pressure? What props, of insuperable strength, sustain the weight? How is that immeasurable arch upheld, unshaken, and unimpaired; while so many generations of busy mortals, have sunk and disappeared, as bubbles upon the stream? If those stars are of such an amazing bulk, how are they also fastened in their lofty situation? By what miracle in mechanics are so many thousands of ponderous orbs kept from falling upon our heads; kept from dashing, both the world to pieces, and its inhabitants to death? Are they hung in golden or adamantine chains? Rest they their enormous load on rocks of marble, or columns of brass? No; they are pendulous in fluid ether? yet, are more immoveably fixed, than if the everlasting mountains lent their forests for an axletree, or their ridges for a basis. The Almighty architect stretches out the north, and its whole starry train, over the empty place. He hangs the earth, and all the ethereal globes, upon nothing;* yet are their foundations laid so sure, that they can 'never be moved at any time.'

No unfit representation, to the sincere Christian, of his final perseverance; such as points out the cause which effects it, and constitutes the pledge which ascertains it. His nature is all enfeebled. He is not able, of himself, to think a good thought. He has no visible safeguard, nor any sufficiency of his own; and yet whole legions of formidable enemies

* Job xxvi. 7.

are in a confederacy to compass his ruin. The world lays unnumbered snares for his feet; the devil is incessantly urging the siege, by a multitude of fiery darts, or wily temptations; the flesh, like a perfidious inmate, under colour of friendship, and a specious pretence of pleasure, is always forward to betray his integrity. But, amidst all these threatening circumstances of personal weakness and imminent danger, an invisible aid is his defence. 'I will uphold thee,' says the blessed God, 'with the right hand of my righteousness.'* Comfortable truth! The arm, which fixes the stars in their orders, and guides the planets in their course, is stretched out to preserve the heirs of salvation.—'My sheep,' adds the great Redeemer, 'are mine; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.'† What words are these! And did they come from him, who hath all power in heaven, and on earth? And were they spoke to the weakest of the flock; to every unfeigned follower of the great Shepherd? Then, Omnipotence itself must be vanquished, before they can be destroyed, either by the seductions of fraud, or the assaults of violence.

If you ask, therefore, what security we have, of enduring to the end, and continuing faithful unto death? The very same that establishes the heavens, and settles the ordinances of the universe. Can these be thrown into confusion?‡ Then may the true believer draw back into perdition. Can the sun be dislodged from his sphere, and rush lawlessly through the sky? Then, and then only, can the faith of God's elect§ be finally overthrown. Be of good cou-

* Isai. xli. 10. † John x. 28.
‡ Jer. xxxi. 35, 36. § Tit. i. 2.

rage then, my soul; rely on those divine succours, which are so solemnly stipulated, so faithfully promised. Though thy grace be languid as the glimmering spark; though the overflowings of corruption threaten it with total extinction; yet since the great Jehovah has undertaken to cherish the dim principle, 'many waters cannot quench it, nor all floods drown it.' Nay, though it were feeble as the smoking flax, goodness and faithfulness stand engaged to augment the heat, to raise the fire, and feed the flame, till it beam forth a lamp of immortal glory to the heavens.

As to the faithfulness of a covenanting God, this may be emblematically seen in the stability of the heavenly bodies, and the perpetuity of their motions.* Those that are fixed or stationary continue unalterable in their grand elevations. No injurious shocks, no violence of conflicting elements, are able to displace those everlasting hinges, on which dependent worlds revolve. Through the whole flight of time, they recede not so much as a hair's breadth from the precise central point of their respective systems; while the erratic or planetary perform their prodigious stages without any intermission or the least embarrassment. How soon and how easily is the most finished piece of human machinery disconcerted! But all the celestial movements are so nicely adjusted, all their operations so critically proportioned, and their mutual dependencies so strongly connected, that they prolong their beneficial courses throughout all ages; while mighty cities are overwhelmed with ruin, and their very names lost in oblivion: while vast empires are swept from their foundations, and leave not so much as a shadowy trace of their ancient mag-

* Psal. cxix. 89, 90.

nificence: while all terrestrial things are subject to vicissitude, and fluctuating in uncertainty, these are permanent in their duration; these are invariable in their functions; 'not one faileth.' Who doubts the constant succession of day and night, or the regular returns of summer and winter? And why, O! why shall we doubt the veracity of God, or distrust the accomplishment of his holy word? Can the ordinances of heaven depart? then only can God forget to be gracious, or neglect the performance of his promise. Nay, our Lord gives us yet firmer ground of affiance. He affords us a surer bottom for our faith than the fundamental laws of the universe. Heaven and earth, he says, shall pass away; but my words shall not, in a single instance, or in one tittle of their import, pass away. No; his sacred word, whatever may obstruct it, whoever may oppose it, shall be fulfilled to the very uttermost.

O powerful word! how astonishing is its efficacy! When this word was issued forth, a thousand worlds emerged out of nothing. Should the mighty orders be repeated, a thousand more would spring into existence. By this word, the vast system of created things is upheld in constant and immutable perfection. Should it give command, or cease to exert its energy, the universal frame would be dissolved, and all nature revert to her original chaos. And this very word is pledged for the safety, the comfort, the happiness of the godly. This inviolable, this almighty word speaks in all the promises of the gospel. How strangely infatuated are our souls, that we should value it so little! What infidels are we in fact, that we should depend upon it no more! Did it create whatever has a being, and shall it not work faith in

our breasts? Do unnumbered worlds owe their support to this word, and shall it not be sufficient to buoy up our souls in troubles, or establish them in trials? Is it the life of the universe, and shall it be a dead letter to mankind?

If I wish to be heard, when I implore heavenly blessings, is not this privilege most clearly made over to my enjoyment in that well-known text, 'Ask, and it shall be given you?'* If I long for the Eternal Comforter to dwell in my heart, and sanctify my nature, have I not an apparent title to this high prerogative conferred in that sweet assertive interrogation, 'How much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him?'† If I earnestly covet the inestimable treasures that are comprised in the great Immanuel's mediation, can I have a firmer claim to the noble portion than is granted in that most precious Scripture, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no-wise cast out?'‡ What assurance of being interested in these unspeakable mercies would I desire? What form of conveyance, what deed of settlement, were it left to my own option, should I choose? Here is the word of a King, the King immortal and invisible, all whose declarations are truth itself.§ If a monarch bestow immunities on a body of men, and confirm them by an authentic charter, no one controverts, no one questions their right to the royal favours. And why should we suspect the validity of those glorious grants, which are made by the everlasting Sovereign of nature, which he has

* Matt. vii. 7. † Luke xi. 13. ‡ John vi. 37.

§ ———— If these fail,
The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble.—*Milt. Comus.*

also ratified by an oath, and sealed with the blood of his Son? Corporations may be disfranchised, and charters revoked. Even mountains may be removed, and stars drop from their spheres: but a tenure, founded on the divine promise, is unalienably secure, is lasting as eternity itself.

We have endeavoured to spell a syllable of the eternal name in the ancient manuscript of the sky. We have catched a glimpse of the Almighty's glory from the lustre of innumerable stars. But would we behold all his excellencies pourtrayed in full perfection, and drawn to the very life, let us attentively consider the Redeemer. I observe there are some parts of the firmament in which the stars seem, as it were, to cluster; they are sown thicker, they lie closer than usual, and strike the eye with redoubled splendour; like the jewels on a crown, they mingle their beams, and reflect an increase of brilliancy on each other. Is there not such an assemblage, such a constellation of the divine honours, most amiably effulgent in the blessed Jesus?

Does not infinite wisdom* shine with surpassing brightness in Christ? To the making of a world there was no obstacle; but to the saving of man, there seemed to be unsurmountable bars. If the rebel is suffered to escape, where is the inflexible justice which denounces 'death as the wages of sin?' If the offender is thoroughly pardoned, where is the inviolable veracity which has solemnly declared, 'The soul that sinneth shall die?' These awful attributes are set in terrible array, and, like an impenetrable battalion, oppose the salvation of apostate mankind. Who can suggest a method to absolve the

* See the next note.

traitorous race, yet vindicate the honours of Almighty Sovereignty? This is an intricacy, which the most exalted of finite intelligences are unable to clear. But behold the unsearchable secret revealed! revealed in the wonderful redemption, accomplished by a dying Saviour! so plainly revealed, that 'he who runs may read,' and even babes understand, what minds of the deepest penetration could not contrive. The Son of God, taking our nature, obeys the law, and undergoes death in our stead: by this means the threatened curse is executed in all its rigour, and free grace is exercised in all its riches. Justice maintains her rights, and, with a steady hand, administers impartial vengeance; while Mercy dispenses her pardons, and welcomes the repentant criminal into the tenderest embraces. Hereby the seemingly thwarting attributes are reconciled. The sinner is saved, not only in full consistence with the honour of the supreme perfections, but to the most illustrious manifestation of them all.

Where does the divine power* so signally exert itself as in the cross of Christ, and in the conquests of grace? Our Lord, in his lowest state of humiliation, gained a more glorious victory, than when, through the dividing sea and the waste howling wilderness, 'he rode upon his chariots and horses of salvation.' When his hands were rivetted with irons to the bloody tree, he disarmed death of its sting, and plucked the prey from the jaws of hell. Then,

* Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God. 1 Cor. i. 24.—To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church (by the amazing contrivance and accomplishment of its redemption) the deep, extensive, and greatly diversified wisdom of God. Eph. iii. 10.

even then, while he was crucified in weakness, he vanquished the strong man, and subdued our most formidable enemies; even then, he spoiled principalities, triumphed over the powers of darkness, and led captivity captive. Now he is exalted to his heavenly throne, with what a prevailing efficacy does his grace go forth, 'conquering, and to conquer!' By this, the slaves of sin are rescued from their bondage, and restored to the liberty of righteousness. By this, depraved wretches, whose appetites were sensual, and their dispositions devilish, are not only renewed, but renewed after the image of God, and made partakers of a divine nature. Millions, millions of lost creatures are snatched, by the interposition of grace, like brands from the burning, and, translated into everlasting mansions, shine brighter than the stars, shine bright as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father.

Would you then see an incomparably more bright display of the divine excellence than the unspotted firmament, the spangles of heaven, or the golden fountain of day exhibit? Contemplate Jesus of Nazareth. He is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. In his immaculate nature, in his heavenly tempers, in his most holy life, the moral perfections of the Deity are represented to the highest advantage.* Hark! how Mercy, with her charming voice, speaks in all he utters. See! how Benevolence pours her choicest stores in all he does. Did ever Compassion look so amiably soft as in those pitying tears, which swelled his eyes, and trickled down his cheeks, to

* In this sense, that saying of our Lord is eminently true, 'He that hath seen me hath seen my Father.' John xiv. 9.

bedew the rancour of his inveterate enemies? Was it possible for Patience to assume a form so lovely as that sweetly-winning conduct, which bore the contradiction of sinners; which entreated the obstinate to be reconciled? besought the guilty not to die? In other things we may find some scattered rays of Jehovah's glory; but in Christ they are all collected and united. In Christ they beam forth with the strongest radiance, with the most delightful effulgence. Out of Sion, and in Sion's Great Redeemer, hath God appeared in perfect beauty.

Search then, my soul, above all other pursuits, search the records of redeeming love. Let these be the principal objects of thy study: here employ thyself with the most unwearied assiduity: in these are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge:* such wisdom, as charms and astonishes the very angels, engages their closest attention, and fills them with the deepest adoration: such knowledge, as qualifies the possessor, if not for offices of dignity on earth, yet for the most honourable advancements in the kingdom of heaven: disunited from which knowledge, all application is but elaborate impertinence, and all science no better than pompous ignorance. These records contain the faultless model of duty, and the noblest motives to obedience. Nothing so powerful, to work a lively faith and joyful hope, as an attentive consideration of our Lord's unutterable merits: nothing so sovereign, to antidote the pestilential influence of the world, and deliver our affections from a slavery to ignoble objects, as an habitual remembrance of his extreme agonies. The genuine, the ever-fruitful souce of all morality, is the un-

* Coloss. ii. 3.

feigned love of Christ; and the cross, the cross, is the appointed* altar, from which we may fetch a coal† to kindle this sacred fire.

Behold, therefore, the man, the matchless and stupendous man, whose practice was a pattern of the most exalted virtue, and his person the mirror of every divine perfection. Examine the memoirs of his heavenly temper and exemplary conversation: contemplate that choir of graces, which were associated in his mind, and shed the highest lustre on all his actions: familiarize to your thoughts his instructive discourses, and enter into the very spirit of his refined doctrines; that the graces may be transfused into thy breast, and the doctrines transcribed in thy life. Follow him to Calvary's horrid eminence, to Calvary's fatal catastrophe; where innocence, dignity and merit, were made perfect through sufferings; each shining with all possible splendour through the tragical scene, somewhat like his own radiant bow, then glowing with the greatest beauty, when appearing on the darkest cloud. Be thy most constant attention fixed on that lovely and sorrowful spectacle. Behold the spotless victim, nailed to the tree, and stabbed to the heart: hear him pouring out prayers for his murderers, before he poured out his soul for transgressors: see the wounds that stream with forgiveness, and bleed balm for a distempered world. O! see the justice of the Almighty, and his goodness; his mercy, and his vengeance; every tremendous and gracious attribute manifested; manifested with inexpressible glory, in that most ignominious, yet grandest of transactions.

* John xii. 32. † Alluding to Isaiah, vi. 6.

Since God is so inconceivably great, as these his marvellous works declare;

> 'Since the great Sov'reign sends ten thousand worlds,
> To tell us, he resides above them all,
> In glory's unapproachable recess;*

how can we forbear hastening, with Moses, bowing ourselves to the earth, and worshipping?

O! what an honourable, as well as advantageous employ, is prayer!—Advantageous: By prayer, we cultivate that improving correspondence with Jehovah, we carry on that gladdening intercourse with his Spirit, which must begin here, in order to be completed in Eternity.—Honourable: By prayer, we have access to that mighty potentate, whose sceptre sways universal nature, and whose rich regalia fills the skies with lustre. Prayer places us in his presence-chamber; while 'the blood of sprinkling' procures us a gracious audience.

Shall I then blush to be found prostrate before the throne of grace? Shall I be ashamed to have it known, that I offer up social supplications in the family, or am conscientious in observing my private retirements? Rather, let me glory in this unspeakable privilege: let me reckon it the noblest posture, to fall low on my knees before his footstool; and the highest honour, to enjoy communion with his most exalted majesty; incomparably more noble, than to sit in person on the triumphal chariot, or to stand in effigy amidst the temple of worthies.

Most inestimable, in such a view, is that promise, which so often occurs in the prophetic writings, and is the crowning benefit of the new covenant, I will

* Young.

be thy God.* Will this supremely excellent and Almighty Being vouchsafe to be my portion? To settle upon a poor sinner, not the heritage of a country, not the possession of the whole earth, but his own ever-blessed self? May I then, through his free condescending grace, and the unknown merits of his Son, look upon all these infinitely noble attributes as my treasure? May I regard the wisdom, which superintends such a multitude of worlds, as my guide; the power, which produced, and preserves them in existence, as my guard; the goodness, which, by an endless communication of favours, renders them all so many habitations of happiness, as my exceeding great reward? what a fund of felicity is included in such a blessing! How often does the Israelitish prince exult in the assurance, that this unutterable and boundless good is his own? Interested in this, he bids defiance to every evil that can be dreaded; and rests in certain expectation of every blessing that can be desired. 'The Lord is my light, and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?' 'The Lord,' with an air of exultation he repeats both his affiance and his challenge, 'is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?'† Nothing so effectual as this appropriating faith, to inspire a dignity of mind, superior to transitory trifles; or to create a calmness of temper, unalarmed by vulgar fears, unappalled by death itself. 'The Lord is my shepherd,' says the same truly gallant and heroic personage: 'therefore shall I lack nothing.‡' How is it possible he should suffer want, who has the all-sufficient fulness for his supply? So long as unerring wisdom is capable of contriving the means; so long as uncontrollable power

* Heb. viii. 10. † Psal. xxvii. 1. ‡ Psal. xxiii. 1.

is able to execute them, such a one cannot fail of being safe and happy, whether he continue amidst the vicissitudes of time, or depart into the unchangeable eternity.

Here let us stand a moment, and humbly contemplate this great God together with ourselves, in a relative view. If we reflect on the works of material nature, their number incomprehensible, and their extent unmeasurable; each of them apart, so admirably framed; the connexions of the whole so exquisitely regulated; and all derived from one and the same glorious agent—if we recollect the far more noble accomplishments of elegant taste and discerning judgment, of refined affections and exalted sentiments, which are to be found among the several orders of intelligent existence; and all of them flowing, in rich emanations, from the one sole fountain of intellectual light—if we farther consider this author of material beauty and moral excellency, as a guardian, a governor, and benefactor to all his creatures; supporting the whole system, and protecting each individual by an ever watchful Providence; presiding over the minutest affairs, and causing all events to terminate in the most extensive good; heaping, with unremitted liberality, his benefits upon every capable object, and making the circuit of the universe a seminary of happiness—is it possible for the human heart, under such captivating views, to be indifferent towards this most benign, most bountiful Original of being and of bliss; can any be so immersed in stupidity, as to say unto the Almighty,—in the language of an irreligious temper and licentious life to say, 'Depart from us; we implore not thy favour; nor desire the knowledge of thy ways?'

Wonder, O Heavens! be amazed, O Earth! and let the inhabitants of both express their astonishment at this unparalleled complication of disingenuous, ungrateful, destructive perverseness!

If we consider our fallen and imperfect state; frail in our bodies, enfeebled in our minds, in every part of our constitution, and in all the occurrences of life, 'like a tottering wall, or a broken hedge'—if we survey our indigent and infirm state, without holiness, without spiritual strength; our possession of present conveniences, entirely dependent on God's sovereign pleasure; yea, forfeited, justly forfeited, with every future hope, by a thousand aggravated iniquities—if we add the various disasters of our condition; agitated as we are by tumultuous passions, oppressed with dispiriting fears, held in suspense by a variety of perplexing cares; liable to pains, and exposed to troubles; troubles from every quarter; troubles of every kind—can we, amidst so many wants, under such deplorable infirmities, and subject to such disastrous accidents—can we be unconcerned, whether God's omnipotent, irresistible, all-conducting hand, be against or for us? Imagination itself shudders at the thought; can we rest satisfied, without a well-grounded persuasion that we are reconciled to this supreme Lord, and the objects of his unchangeable goodness? If there be an abandoned wretch, whose apprehensions are so fatally blinded; who is so utterly lost to all sense of his duty, and of his interest; let me bewail his misery, while I abhor his impiety; bewail his misery, though popularity, with her choicest laurels, adorn his brow; though affluence, with her richest delicacies, load his table; though half a nation or half a world, conspire to call him happy.

May I, by a believing application, solace myself in this everlasting Source of love, perfection and joy? Grant me this request, and I ask no more:—Only, that I may expect, not with a reluctant anxiety, but with a ready cheerfulness, the arrival of that important hour, when this veil of flesh shall drop, and the shadows of mortality flee away; when I shall no longer complain of obscure knowledge, languid affections, and imperfect fruition—but shall see the uncreated and immortal Majesty; see him, not in this distant unaffecting method of reasoning from his works, but with the most clear and direct intuition of the mind—when I shall love him, not with a cold and contracted spirit, but with the most lively and enlarged emotions of gratitude—when I shall incessantly enjoy the light of his countenance? and be united, inseparably united, to his all-glorious godhead. Take, ye ambitious, unenvied, and unopposed, take to yourselves the toys of state. May I be enabled to rejoice in this blessed hope, and to triumph in that amiable, that adorable, that delightful name, the Lord my God! and I shall scarce bestow a thought on the splendid pagentry of the world, unless it be to despise its empty pomp, and to pity its deluded admirers.

All these bodies, though immense in their size, and almost infinite in their multitude, are obedient to the divine command. The God of wisdom 'telleth their numbers,' and is intimately acquainted with their various properties. The God of power, 'calleth them all by their names, and assigns them whatsoever office he pleases.—He marshals all the starry legions with infinitely greater ease, and nicer order, than the most expert general arranges his disciplined

troops.—He appoints their posts; he marks their route; he fixes the time for their return. The posts which he appoints, they occupy without fail; in the route which he settles, they persevere, without the least deviation; and to the instant* which he fixes for their return, they are precisely punctual,—He has given them a law, which, through a long revolution of ages, shall not be broken, unless his sovereign will interposes for its repeal. Then, indeed, the motion of the celestial orbs is controlled; their action remains suspended; or their influence receives a new direction. The sun, at his creation, issued forth with a command to travel perpetually through the heavens; since which, he has never neglected to perform the great circuit, rejoicing as a giant, to 'run his race.' But when it is requisite to accomplish the purposes of divine love, the orders are countermanded; the flaming courier remits his career; stands still in Gibeon;† and, for the conveniency of the chosen people, holds back the falling day. The moon was dispatched with a charge, never to intermit her revolving course till day and night come to an end. But when the children of Providence are to be favoured with an uncommon continuance of light, she halts in her march; makes a solemn pause in the valley of Aijalon;‡ and delays to bring on her

* 'The planets, and all the innumerable host of heavenly bodies, perform their courses and revolutions with so much certainty and exactness, as never once to fail: but for almost 6000 years, come constantly about to the same period, in the hundredth part of a minute.' Stackhouse's Hist. Bible.

† This is spoken in conformity to the Scripture language, and according to the common notion. With respect to the power which effected the alteration it is much the same thing, and alike miraculous, whether the sun or the earth be supposed to move.

‡ Josh. x. 12, 13.

attendant train of shadows.—'When the enemies of the Lord are to be discomfited, the stars are levied into the service; the stars are armed, and take the field; the stars, in their courses, fought against Sisera.'*

So dutiful is material nature! so obsequious, in all her forms, to her Creator's pleasure! The bellowing thunders listen to his voice; and the volleyed lightnings observe the direction of his eye. The flying storm and impetuous whirlwind wear his yoke. The raging waves revere his nod: they shake the earth; they dash the skies; yet never offer to pass the limits which he has prescribed. Even the planetary spheres, though vastly larger than this wide-extended earth, are, in his hand, as clay in the hands of the potter. Though swifter than the northern blast, they sweep the long tracts of ether, yet are they guided by his reins, and execute whatever he enjoins. All those enormous globes of central fire which beam through the boundless azure, in comparison of which, an army of planets were like a swarm of summer insects; those, even those, are conformable to his will, as the melting wax to the impressed seal. Since all, all is obedient throughout the whole ascent of things, shall man be the only rebel against the Almighty Maker? Shall these unruly appetites reject his government, and refuse their allegiance? Shall these headstrong passions break loose from divine restraint, and run wild in exorbitant sallies, after their own imaginations?

O my soul, be stung with remorse, and overwhelmed with confusion, at the thought! Is it not a righteous thing, that the blessed God should sway

* Judg. v. 20.

the sceptre, with the most absolute authority, over all the creatures which his power has formed? especically over those creatures, whom his distinguishing favour has endued with the noble principle of reason, and made capable of a blissful immortality? Sure, if all the ranks of inanimate existence conform to their Maker's decree, by the necessity of their nature, this more excellent race of beings should pay their equal homage by the willing compliance of their affections. Come then, all ye faculties of my mind; come, all ye powers of my body; give up yourselves without a moment's delay, without the least reserve, to his governance. Stand, like dutiful servants, at his footstool, in an everlasting readiness to do whatsoever he requires, to be whatsoever he appoints; to further, with united efforts, the purposes of his glory in this earthly scene; or else to separate, without reluctance, at his summons: the one, to sleep in the silent dust; the other, to advance his honour in some remoter colony of his kingdom. Thus may I join with all the works of the Lord, in all places of his dominion, to recognise his universal supremacy; and proclaim him sovereign of Souls as well as Ruler of Worlds.

At my first coming abroad, all these luminaries were eclipsed by the overpowering lustre of the sun; they were all placed in the very same stations, and played the same sprightly beams; yet not one of them was seen. As the day-light wore away, and the sober shades advanced, Hesperus, who leads the starry train, disclosed his radiant forehead, and catched my eye. While I stood gazing on his bright and beautiful aspect, several of his attendants peeped through the blue curtains. Scarce had I turned to

observe these fresh emanations of splendour, but others dropped the veil, others stole into view. When lo! faster and more numerous multitudes sprung from obscurity; they poured in shining troops, and in sweet confusion, over all the empyrean plain: till the firmament seemed like one vast constellation, and 'a flood of glory burst from all the skies.'

Is not such the rise, and such the progress of a true conversion, in the prejudiced infidel, or inattentive sinner? During the period of his vainer years, a thousand interesting truths lay utterly undiscovered; a thousand momentous concerns were entirely disregarded; but when divine grace dissipates the delusive glitter which dazzled his understanding, and beguiled his affections, then he begins to discern, dimly to discern, the things which belong unto his peace. Some admonition of Scripture darts conviction into his soul, as the glimmering of a star pierces the gloom of night: then, perhaps, another awful or cheering text impresses terror or diffuses comfort; a threatening alarms his fears, or a promise awakens his hopes. This, possibly, is succeeded by some afflictive dispensation of Providence, and improved by some edifying and instructive conversation. All which is established as to its continuance, and enlarged as to its influence, by a diligent study of the sacred word. By this means, new truths continually pour their evidence; scenes of refined and exalted, but hitherto unknown delight, address him with their attractives; new desires take wing; new pursuits are set on foot; a new turn of mind forms his temper; a new habit of conversation regulates his life. In a word, old things are passed away, and all things become new; he, who was sometime darkness, is now light, and life, and joy in the Lord.

The more attentively I view the crystal concave, the more fully I discern the richness of its decorations. Abundance of minuter lights, which lay concealed from a superficial notice, are visible on a closer examination: especially in those tracts of the sky which are called the galaxy, and are distinguishable by a sort of milky path. There the stars are crowded, rather than disseminated: the region seems to be all on a blaze with their blended rays. Besides this vast profusion, which in my present situation the eye discovers, was I to make my survey from any other part of the globe, lying nearer to the southern pole, I should behold a new choir of starry bodies, which have never appeared within our horizon. Was I (which is more wonderful), either here or there, to view the firmament with the virtuoso's glass, I should find a prodigious multitude of flaming orbs, which, immersed in depths of ether, escape the keenest unassisted sight. Yet, in these various situations, even with the aid of the telescopic tube, I should not be able to descry the half, perhaps not a thousandth part of those majestic luminaries, which the vast expansive heavens contain.* So, the more diligently I pursue my search into those oracles of eternal truth, the Scriptures, I perceive a wider, a deeper, an ever-increasing fund of spiritual treasures. I perceive the brighter strokes of wisdom, and the richer displays

* How noble, considered in this view, are celebrations of the Divine Majesty, which frequently occur in the sacred writings! 'It is the Lord that made the heavens.' Psal. xcvi. 5. What a prodigious dignity does such a sense of things give to that devout ascription of praise! 'Thou, even thou, art Lord alone: thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host.' Nehem. ix. 6. Examined by this rule, the beautiful climax in our inspired hymn is sublime beyond compare: 'Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all ye stars of light: praise him, ye heaven of heavens.' Psal. cxlviii. 3, 4.

of goodness; a more transcendent excellency in the illustrious Messiah, and a more deplorable vileness in fallen man; a more immaculate purity in God's law, and more precious privileges in his gospel. Yet, after a course of study ever so assiduous, ever so prolonged, I should have reason to own myself a mere babe in heavenly knowledge; or, at most, but a puerile proficient in the school of Christ.

After all my most accurate inspection, those starry orbs appear but as glittering points. Even the planets, though so much nearer our earthly mansion, seem only like burning bullets. If, then, we have such imperfect apprehensions of visible and material things, how much more scanty and inadequate must be our notions of invisible and immortal objects! We behold the stars: though every one is incomparably bigger than the globe we inhabit, yet they dwindle, upon our survey, into the most diminutive forms. Thus, we see by faith the glories of the blessed Jesus; the atoning efficacy of his death; the justifying merit of his righteousness; and the joys which are reserved for his followers. But, alas! even our most exalted ideas are vastly below the truth: as much below the truth, as the report which our eyes make of those celestial edifices, is inferior to their real grandeur. Should we take in all the magnifying assistances which art has contrived, those luminous bodies would elude our skill, and appear as small as ever. Should an inhabitant of earth travel towards the cope of heaven, and be carried forwards, in his aërial journey, more than a hundred and sixty millions of miles;*

* This, incredible as it may seem, is not a mere supposition, but a real fact: for, about the twenty-first of December, we are about 160,000,000 of miles nearer the northern parts of

even in that advanced situation, those oceans of flame would look no larger than radiant specks. In like manner, conceive ever so magnificently of the Redeemer's honours, and of the bliss which he has purchased for his people; yet you will fall short. Raise your imagination higher; stretch your invention wider; give them all the scope which a soaring and excursive fancy can take; still your conceptions will be extremely disproportionate to their genuine perfections. Vast are the bodies which roll in the expanse of heaven: vaster far are those fields of ether, through which they run their endless round: but the excellency of Jesus, and the happiness laid up for his servants, are greater than either; than both; than all. An inspired writer calls the former 'The unsearchable riches of Christ;' and styles the latter 'An exceeding great and eternal weight of glory.'

If those stars are so many inexhaustible magazines of fire, and immense reservoirs of light, there is no reason to doubt but they have some very grand uses, suitable to the magnificence of their nature. To specify, or explain, the particular purposes they answer, is altogether impossible in our present state of distance and ignorance: this, however, we may clearly discern; they are disposed in that very manner which is most pleasing and most serviceable to mankind. They are not placed at an infinite remove, so as to lie beyond our sight; neither are they brought so near our abode, as to annoy us with their beams. We see them shine on every side: the deep azure, which

the sky, than we were at the twenty-first of June, and yet, with regard to the stars situate in that quarter, we perceive no change in their aspect, nor any augmentation of their magnitude.

serves them as a ground, heightens their splendour; at the same time, their influence is gentle, and their rays are destitute of heat: so that we are surrounded with a multitude of fiery globes, which beautify and illuminate the firmament, without any risk, either to the coolness of our night, or the quiet of our repose. Who can sufficiently admire that wondrous benignity, which, on our account, strews the earth with blessings of every kind, and vouchsafes to make the very heavens subservient to our delight?

It is not solely to adorn the roof of our palace with costly gildings, that God commands the celestial luminaries to glitter through the gloom: we also reap considerable benefits from their ministry. They divide our time, and fix its solemn periods. They settle the order of our works, and are, according to the destinations mentioned in sacred writ, 'for signs, and for seasons; for days and for years.' The returns of heat and cold alone would have been too precarious a rule. But these radiant bodies, by the variation, and also by the regularity of their motions, afford a method of calculating, absolutely certain, and sufficiently obvious. By this, the farmer is instructed when to commit his grain to the furrows, and how to conduct the operations of husbandry. By this, the sailor knows when to proceed on his voyage with least peril, and how to carry on the business of navigation with most success.

Why should not the Christian, the probationer for eternity, learn from the same monitors, to number—for nobler purposes, to number his days; and duly to transact the grand, grand affairs of his everlasting salvation? Since God has appointed so many bright measures of our time, to determine its larger periods.

and to minute down its ordinary stages; sure, this most strongly inculcates its value, and should powerfully prompt us to improve it. Behold! the supreme Lord marks the progress of our life in that most conspicuous calendar above. Does not such an ordination tell us, and in the most emphatical language, that our life is given for use, not for waste; that no portion of it is delivered, but under a strict account; that all of it is entered, as it passes, in the divine register; and, therefore, that the stewards of such a talent are to expect a future reckoning? Behold! the very heavens are bidden to be the accomptants of our years, and months, and days. O! may this induce us to manage them with a vigilant frugality; to part with them, as misers with their hoarded treasure, warily and circumspectly; and, if possible, as merchants with their rich commodities, not without an equivalent, either in personal improvement or social usefulness!

How bright the starry diamonds shine! The ambition of eastern monarchs could imagine no distinction more noble and sublime than that of being likened to those beaming orbs.* They form night's richest dress; and sparkle upon her sable robe, like jewels of the finest lustre: like jewels! I wrong their character. The lucid stone has no brilliancy; quenched is the flame even of the golden topaz, compared with those glowing decorations of heaven. How widely are their radiant honours diffused! No nation so remote, but sees their beauty, and rejoices in their usefulness. They have been admired by all preceding generations, and every rising age will gaze on their charms with

* Numb. xxiv. 17. Dan. viii. 10.

renewed delight. How animating, then, is that promise made to the faithful ministers of the gospel! 'They that turn many to righteousness, shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.'* Is not this a most winning encouragement, 'to spend and be spent' in the service of souls? Methinks, the stars beckon, as they twinkle. Methinks, they show me their splendours, on purpose to inspire me with alacrity in the race set before me; on purpose to enliven my activity in the work than is given me to do. Yes; ye majestic monitors, I understand your meaning. If honour has any charms; if true glory, the glory which cometh from God, is any attractive; you display the most powerful incitements to exercise all assiduity in my holy vocation. I will henceforth observe your intimation; and, when zeal becomes languid, have recourse to your heavenly lamps, if so be I may kindle its ardour at those inextinguishable fires.

Of the Polar star it is observable, that while other luminaries alter their situation, this seems invariably fixed.† While other luminaries now mount the battlements of heaven, and appear upon duty; now retire beneath the horizon, and resign to a fresh set the watches of the night; this never departs from its station. This, in every season, maintains an uniform position; and is always to be found in the same tract of the northern sky. How often has this beamed bright intelligence on the sailor, and conducted the keel to the desired haven! In early ages, those who

* Dan. xii. 3.

† I speak in conformity to the appearance of the object: for, though this remarkable star revolves round the pole, its motion is so slow, and the circle it describes so small, as render both the revolution and change of situation hardly perceivable.

went down to the sea in ships, and occupied their business in great waters, had scarce any other sure guide for their wandering vessel! This, therefore, they viewed with the most solicitous attention: by this they formed their observations, and regulated their voyage. When this was obscured by clouds, or enveloped in mists, the trembling mariner was bewildered on the watery waste; his thoughts fluctuated as much as the floating surge, and he knew not where he was advanced, or whither he should steer. But, when this auspicious star broke through the gloom, it dissipated the anxiety of his mind, and cleared up his dubious passage: he re-assumed, with alacrity, the management of the helm, and was able to shape his course with some tolerable degree of satisfaction and certainty.

Such, only much clearer in its light, and much surer in its direction, is the Holy Word of God to those myriads of intellectual beings, who are bound for the eternal shores; who, embarked in a vessel of feeble flesh, are to pass the waves of this tempestuous and perilous world. In all difficulties, those sacred pages shed an encouraging ray; in all uncertainties, they suggest the right determination, and point out the proper procedure. What is still a more inestimable advantage, they, like the star which conducted the eastern sages, make plain the way of access to a Redeemer: they display his unspeakable merits; they discover the method of being interested in this great atonement; and lead the weary soul, tossed by troubles, and shattered by temptations, to that only harbour of peaceful repose. Let us, therefore, attend to this unerring directory, with the same constancy of regard as the sea-faring man ob-

serves his compass. Let us become as thoroughly acquainted with this sacred chart, as the pilot is with every trusty mark that gives notice of a lurking rock, and with every open road that yields a safe passage into the port. Above all, let us commit ourselves to this infallible guidance with the same implicit resignation; let us conform our conduct to its exalted precepts with the same sedulous care; as the children of Israel, when sojourning in the trackless desert, followed the pillar of fire, and the motion of the miraculous cloud. So will it introduce us, not into an earthly Canaan, flowing with milk and honey, but into an immortal Paradise, where is the fulness of joy, and where are pleasures for evermore. It will introduce us into those happy, happy regions, where our sun shall no more go down, nor our moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning, together with the fatigues of our pilgrimage, shall be ended.*

I perceive a great variety in the size and splendour of those gems of heaven. Some are of the first magnitude, others of an inferior order. Some glow with intense flames, others glimmer with fainter beams. Yet all are beautiful; all have their peculiar lustre, and distinct use; all tend, in their different degrees, to enamel the cope of heaven, and embroider the robe of night. This circumstance is remarked by an author, whose sentiments are a source of wisdom, and the very standard of truth. 'One star,' says the apostle to the Gentiles, 'differeth from another star in glory; so also is the resurrection of the dead.'

In the world above, are various degrees of happi-

* Isai. lx. 20.

ness, various seats of honour. Some will rise to more illustrious distinctions and richer joys;* some, like vessels of ample capacity, will admit more copious accessions of light and excellence. Yet there will be no want, no deficiency, in any, but a fulness both of divine satisfactions and personal perfections. Each will enjoy all the good, and be adorned with all the glory, that his heart can wish, or his condition receive. None will know what it is to envy. Not the least malevolence, nor the least selfishness, but everlasting friendship prevails, and a mutual complacency in each other's delight. Love, cordial love, will give every particular saint a participation of all the fruitions which are diffused through the whole assembly of the blessed. No one eclipses, but each reflects light upon his brother. A sweet interchange of rays subsists, all enlightened by the great fountain, and all enlightening one another; by which reciprocal communication of pleasure and amity, each will be continually receiving from, each incessantly adding to, the general felicity.

Happy, supremely happy, they who are admitted into the celestial mansions. Better to be a doorkeeper in those 'ivory palaces,'† than to fill the most gorgeous throne on earth. The very lowest place at God's right hand is distinguished honour and consummate bliss. O! that we may, in some measure, anticipate the beatific state while we remain in our banishment below! May we, by rejoicing in the superior prosperity of another, make it our own! and, provided the general result is harmony, be content, be pleased, with whatsoever part

* 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42. † Psal. xlv. 8.

is assigned to our share, in the universal choir of affairs.

While I am considering the heavenly bodies, I must not entirely forget those fundamental laws of our modern astronomy, projection and attraction; one of which is the all-combining cement, the other is the ever-operative spring of the mighty frame. In the beginning, the all-creating fiat impressed a proper degree of motion on each of those whirling orbs; which, if not controlled, would have carried them on in straight lines and to endless lengths, till they were even lost in the abyss of space; but the gravitating property being added to the projectile force, determined their courses to a circular* form; and obliged the reluctant rovers to perform their destined rounds. Were either of those causes to suspend their action, all the harmoniously moving spheres would be disconcerted, would degenerate into sluggish inactive masses, and, falling into the central fire, be burnt to ashes; or else, would exorbitate into wild confusion, and each, by the rapidity of its whirl, be dissipated

* I am aware the planetary orbs are not strictly circular, but rather elliptical. However, as they are but a small remove from the perfectly round figure, and partake of it incomparably more than the trajectories of the comets, I choose to represent the thing in this view; especially, because the notion of a circle is so much more intelligible to the generality of readers than that of an ellipsis; and because I laid it down for a rule, not to admit any such abstruse sentiment or difficult expression, as should demand a painful attention, instead of raising an agreeable idea. For which reason, I have avoided technical terms, have taken no notice of Jupiter's satellites, or Saturn's ring; have not so much as mentioned the names of the planets, nor attempted to wade into any depths of the science; lest to those who have no opportunity of using the telescope, or of acquainting themselves with a system of astronomy, I should propound riddles, rather than display entertaining and edifying truths.

into atoms. But the impulsive and attractive energy being most nicely attempered to each other, and under the immediate operation of the Almighty exerting themselves in perpetual concert, the various globes run their radiant races without the least interruption or the least deviation; so as to create the alternate changes of day and night, and distribute the useful vicissitudes of succeeding seasons; so as to answer all the great ends of a gracious Providence, and procure every comfortable convenience for universal nature.

Does not this constitution of the material very naturally lead the thoughts to those grand principles of the moral and devotional world, faith and love? These are often celebrated by the inspired apostle, as a comprehensive summary of the gospel.* These inspirit the breast, and regulate the progress of each private Christian. These unite the whole congregation of the faithful to God and one another: to God, the great centre in the bonds of gratitude and devotion; to one another, by a reciprocal intercourse of brotherly affections and friendly offices. If you ask, why is it impossible for the true believer to live at all adventures, to stagnate in sloth, or habitually to deviate from duty; we answer, it is owing to 'his faith working by love.'† He assuredly trusts that Christ has sustained the infamy and endured the torment due to his sins. He firmly relies on that divine propitiation for the pardon of all his guilt, and humbly expects everlasting salvation, as the purchase of his Saviour's merits. This produces such a spirit of gratitude, as refines his inclinations, and animates his whole behaviour. He cannot, he cannot run to

* Col. i. 4. Philem. ver. 5. † Gal. v. 6.

excess of riot, because love to his adorable Redeemer, like a strong but silken curb, sweetly restrains him; he cannot, he cannot lie lulled in a lethargic indolence, because love to the same infinite Benefactor, like a pungent but endearing spur, pleasingly excites him. In a word, faith supplies the powerful impulse, while love gives the determining bias, and leads the willing feet through the whole circle of God's commandments. By the united efficacy of these heavenly graces, the Christian conduct is preserved in the uniformity and beauty of holiness, as by the blended power of those Newtonian principles, the solar system revolves in a steady and magnificent regularity.

How admirable, how extensive, how diversified, is the force of this single principle, attraction!* This penetrates the very essence of all bodies, and diffuses itself to the remotest limits of the mundane system. By this, the worlds impressed with motion, hang self-balanced on their centres: and though orbs of immense magnitude, require nothing but this amazing property for their support. To this we ascribe a phenomenon of a very different kind, the pressure of the atmosphere; which, though a yielding and expansive fluid, yet, constipated by an attractive energy, surrounds the whole globe, and incloses every creature as it were with a tight bandage; an expedient this, absolutely necessary to preserve the texture of our bodies, and indeed to maintain every species of animal existence. Attraction! Urged by this wonderful impetus, the rivers circulate, copious and unintermitted, among all the nations of the earth; sweeping with rapidity down the steeps, or

* I mean the attraction both of gravitation and cohesion.

softly ebbing through the plains. Impelled by the same mysterious force, the nutritious juices are detached from the soil, and, ascending the trees, find their way through millions of the finest meanders, in order to transfuse vegetative life into all the branches. This confines the ocean within proper bounds: though the waves thereof roar, though they toss themselves with all the madness of indignant rage; yet, checked by this potent, this inevitable curb, they are unable to pass even the slightest barrier of sand. To this the mountains owe that unshaken firmness, which laughs at the shock of careering winds, and bids the tempest, with all its mingled horrors, impotently rave: by virtue of this invisible mechanism, without the aid of crane or pulley, or any instrument of human device, many thousand tons of water are raised every moment into the regions of the firmament; by this they continue suspended in thin air, without any capacious cistern to contain their substance, or any massy pillars to sustain their weight; by this same variously acting power, they return to the place of their native residence, distilled in gentle falls of dew, or precipitated in impetuous showers of rain; they slide into the fields in fleecy flights of snow, or are darted upon the houses in clattering storms of hail: this occasions the strong cohesion of solid bodies; without which our large machines could exert themselves with no vigour, and the nicer utensils of life would elude our expectations of service; this affords a foundation for all those delicate or noble mechanic arts, which furnish mankind with numberless conveniences both of ornament and delight: in short, this is the prodigious ballast, which composes the equilibrium, and consti-

tutes the stability of things; this is the great chain which forms the connexions of universal nature; and the mighty engine which prompts, facilitates, and, in good measure, accomplishes all her operations. What complicated effects from a single cause! What profusion amidst frugality! an unknown profusion of benefits with the utmost frugality of expense!

And what is this attraction? Is it a quality, in its existence, inseparable from matter; and, in its acting, independent on the Deity? Quite the reverse: it is the very finger of God; the constant impression of divine power; a principle, neither innate in matter, nor intelligible by mortals. Does it not, however, bear a considerable analogy to the agency of the Holy Ghost in the Christian economy? Are not the gracious operations of the blessed Spirit thus extensive, thus admirable, thus various? That Almighty Being transmits his gifts through every age, and communicates his graces to every adherent on the Redeemer; all, either of illustrious memory, or of beneficial tendency; in a word, 'all the good that is done upon earth, he doth it himself.' Strong in his aid, and in the power of his might, the saints of all times have trod vice under their feet, have triumphed over this abject world, and conversed in heaven while they dwelt on earth. Not I, but the grace of God which was with me,* is the unanimous acknowledgment of them all. By the same kindly succours, the whole church is still enlightened, quickened, and governed. Through his benign influences, the scales of ignorance fall from the understanding, the leprosy of evil concupiscence is purged

* 1 Cor. xv. 10.

from the will, and the fetters, the more than adamantine fetters, of habitual iniquity, drop off from the conversation. He breathes even upon dry bones, and they live; they are animated with faith, they pant with ardent and heavenly desire, they exercise themselves with all the duties of godliness. His real, though secret inspiration, dissolves the flint in the impenitent breast, and binds up the sorrows of the broken heart; raises the thoughts high in the elevations of holy hope, yet lays them low in the humiliations of inward abasement; steels the soul with impenetrable resolutions and persevering fortitude, at the same time softens it into a dove-like meekness, and melts it in penitential sorrow.

When I contemplate those ample and magnificent structures, erected over all the ethereal plains; when I look upon them as so many splendid repositories of light, or fruitful abodes of life; when I remember that there may be other orbs, vastly more remote than those which appear to our unaided sight; orbs, whose effulgence, though travelling ever since the creation, is not yet arrived upon our coasts: when I stretch my thoughts to the innumerable orders of being which inhabit all those spacious systems, from the loftiest seraph to the lowest reptile; from the armies of angels which surround the throne of Jehovah, to the puny nations which tinge with blue the surface of the plum, or mantle the standing pool with green:—how various appear the links in this immense chain! how vast the gradations in this universal scale of existence! Yet all these, though ever so vast and various, are the work of God's hand, and are full of his presence.

He rounded in his palm those dreadfully large

globes, which are pendulous in the vault of heaven. He kindled those astonishingly bright fires which fill the firmament with a flood of glory. By him they are suspended in fluid ether, and cannot be shaken; by him they dispense a perpetual tide of beams, and are never exhausted. He formed, with inexpressible nicety, that delicately fine collection of tubes, that unknown multiplicity of subtile springs, which organize and actuate the frame of the minutest insect; he bids the crimson current roll, the vital movements play, and associates a world of wonders, even in an animated point.* In all these is a signal exhibition of creating power; to all these are extended the special regards of preserving goodness. From hence let me learn to rely on the providence, and to revere the presence of the Supreme Majesty.

To rely on his providence.—For amidst that inconceivable number and variety of beings which swarm through the regions of creation, not one is overlooked, not one is neglected by the great Omni-

* There are living creatures, abundantly smaller than the mite. Mr. Bradley, in his Treatise on Gardening, mentions an insect, which, after accurate examination, he found to be a thousand times less than the least visible grain of sand. Yet such an insect, though quite imperceptible to the naked eye, is an elephant, is a whale, compared with other animalcules almost infinitely more minute, discovered by Mr. Lewenhoeck. If we consider the several limbs which compose such an organized particle, the different muscles which actuate such a set of limbs, the flow of spirits incomparably more attenuated, which put those muscles in motion, the various fluids which circulate, the different secretions which are performed, together with the peculiar minuteness of the solids before they arrive at their full growth: not to mention other more astonishing modes of diminution—sure, we shall have the utmost reason to acknowledge, that the adored Maker is '*Maximus in minimis*, greatly glorious even in his smallest works.'

potent Cause of all. However inconsiderabe in its character, or diminutive, in its size, it is still the production of Universal Maker, and belongs to the family of the Almighty Father. What though enthroned archangels enjoy the smiles of his countenance! Yet the low inhabitants of earth, the most despicable worms of the ground, are not excluded from his providential care. Though the manifestation of his perfections is vouchsafed in holy and intellectual essences, his ear is open to the cries of the young raven; his eye is attentive to the wants and to the welfare of the very meanest births of nature. How much less then are his own people disregarded; those for whom he has delivered his beloved Son to death, and for whom he has prepared habitations of eternal joy! They disregarded! No; they are 'kept as the apple of an eye;' the very hairs of their head are all numbered. The fondest mother may forget the infant that is 'dandled upon her knees,' and sucks at her breast,* much sooner than the Father of everlasting compassions can discontinue or remit his watchful tenderness to his people, his children, his heirs.

Let this teach me also a more lively sense of the divine presence. All the rolling worlds above, all the living atoms below, together with all the beings that intervene betwixt these wide extremes, are vouchers for an ever-present Deity. 'God has not left himself without witness;' the marks of his footsteps are evident in every place, and the touches of his finger distinguishable in every creature. Thy name is so nigh, O thou all-supporting, all-informing Lord, and that do thy wondrous works declare.†

* Isai. xlix. 15. † Psal. lxxv. 1.

Thy goodness warms in the morning sun, and refreshes in the evening breeze; thy glory shines in the lamps of midnight, and smiles in the blossoms of spring. We see a trace of thy incomprehensible grandeur in the boundless extent of things; and a sketch of thy exquisite skill in those almost evanescent sparks of life, the insect race. How stupid is this heart of mine, that, amidst such a multitude of remembrancers, thronging on every side, I should forget thee a single moment! Grant me, thou great I AM, thou source and support of universal existence!—O! grant me an enlightened eye, to discern thee in every object, and a devout heart, to adore thee on every occasion. Instead of living without God in the world, may I be ever with him, and see all things full of him!

——The glitt'ring stars,
By the deep ear of meditation heard,
Still in their midnight watches sing of Him.
He nods a Calm. The tempest blows his wrath.
The thunder is his voice; and the red flash
His speedy sword of justice. At his touch
The mountains flame. He shakes the solid earth,
And rocks the nations. Nor in these alone,
In ev'ry common instance God is seen.—*Thomson's Spring.*

If the beautiful spangles, which a clear night pours on the beholder's eye; if those other fires, which beam in remoter skies, and are discoverable only by that revelation to the sight, the telescope; if all those bright millions, are so many fountains of day, enriched with native and independent lustre, illuminating planets, and enlivening systems of their own; what pomp, how majestic and splendid, is disclosed in the midnight scenes! What riches are disseminated through all those numberless provinces of the great Jehovah's empire! Grandeur beyond expression!

Yet, there is not the meanest slave, but carries greater wealth in his own bosom, possesses superior dignity in his own person. The soul, that informs his clay; the soul that teaches him to think, and enables him to choose; that qualifies him to relish rational pleasure, and to breathe sublime desire;—the soul, that is endowed with such noble faculties; and, above all, is distinguished with the dreadful, the glorious capacity, of being pained or blessed, for ever; this soul surpasses in worth, whatever the eye can see; whatever of material the fancy can imagine. Before one such intellectual being, all the treasure and all the magnificence of unintelligent creation becomes poor and contemptible. For this soul, Omnipotence itself has waked, and worked, through every age. To convince this soul, the fundamental laws of nature have been controlled, and the most amazing miracles have alarmed all the ends of the earth. To instruct this soul, the wisdom of heaven has been transfused into the sacred page, and missionaries have been sent from the Great King, who resides in light unapproachable. To sanctify this soul, the Almighty Comforter takes the wings of a dove; and, with a sweet transforming influence, broods on the human heart. And O! to redeem this soul from guilt; to rescue it from hell; the heaven of heavens was bowed, and God himself came down to dwell in dust.

Let me pause awhile on this important subject. What are the schemes which engage the attention of eminent statesmen and mighty monarchs, compared with the grand interests of an immortal soul? The support of commerce, and the success of armies, though extremely weighty affairs; yet, if laid in the balance against the salvation of a soul, are lighter

than the downy feather poised against talents of gold. To save a navy from shipwreck, or a kingdom from slavery, are deliverances of the most momentous nature which the transactions of mortality can admit. But O! how they shrink into an inconsiderable trifle, if (their aspect upon immortality forgot) they are set in competition with the delivery of a single soul, from the anguish and horror of a distressed eternity!

Is such the importance of the soul? What vigilance then can be too much; or rather what holy solicitude can be sufficient, for the overseers of the Saviour's flock, and the guardians of this great, this venerable, this invaluable charge? Since such is the importance of the soul, wilt thou not, O man, be watchful for the preservation of thy own? Shall every casual incident awaken thy concern; every transitory toy command thy regard, and shall the welfare of thy soul, a work of continual occurrence, a work of endless consequence, sue in vain, for thy serious care? Thy soul, thy soul, is thy all. If this be secured, thou art greatly rich, and wilt be unspeakably happy. If this be lost, a whole world acquired will leave thee in poverty; and all its delights enjoyed, will abandon thee to misery.

I have often been charmed and awed, at the sight of the nocturnal heavens; even before I knew how to consider them in their proper circumstance of majesty and beauty. Something like magic has struck my mind, on a transient and unthinking survey of the ethereal vault; tinged throughout with the purest azure, and decorated with innumerable starry lamps. I have felt, I know not what, powerful and aggrandizing impulse, which seemed to snatch me from the

low entanglements of vanity, and prompted an ardent sigh for sublimer objects, Methought I heard, even from the silent spheres, a commanding call, to spurn the abject earth, and pant after unseen delights. Henceforward, I hope to imbibe more copiously this moral emanation of the skies; when, in some such manner as the preceding, they are rationally seen, and the sight is duly improved. The stars, I trust will teach as well as shine; and help to dispel, both nature's gloom, and my intellectual darkness. To some people, they discharge no better a service than that of holding a flambeau to their feet, and softening the horrors of their night. To me and my friends, may they act as ministers of a superior order: as counsellors of wisdom, and guides to happiness! Nor will they fail to execute this nobler office, if they gently light our way into the knowledge of their adored Maker; if they point out, with their silver rays, our path to his beatific presence.

I gaze, I ponder. I ponder, I gaze; and think ineffable things. I roll an eye of awe and admiration. Again and again I repeat my ravished views, and can never satiate either my curiosity or my inquiry. I spring my thoughts into this immense field, till even fancy tires upon her wing; I find wonders, ever new; wonders more and more amazing. Yet, after all my present inquiries, what a mere nothing do I know; by all my future searches, how little shall I be able to learn of those vastly distant suns, and their circling retinue of worlds! Could I pry with Newton's piercing sagacity, or launch into his extensive surveys; even then, my apprehensions would be little better than those dim and scanty images which the mole, just emerged from her cavern, receives on her

feeble optic.—This, sure, should repress all impatient or immoderate ardour to pry into the secrets of the starry structures, and make me more particularly careful to cultivate my heart. To fathom the depths of the Divine Essence; or to scan universal nature, with a critical exactness, is an attempt, which sets the acutest philosopher very nearly on a level with the idiot; since it is almost, if not altogether, as impracticable by the former as by the latter.

Be it then, my chief study, not to pursue what is absolutely unattainable; but rather to seek, what is obvious to find, easy to be acquired, and of inestimable advantage when possessed. O! let me seek that charity, which edifieth;* that faith, which purifieth. Love, humble love, not conceited science, keeps the door of heaven. Faith, a child-like faith in Jesus; not the haughty self-sufficient spirit, which scorns to be ignorant of any thing; presents a key† to those abodes of bliss. This present state is the scene destined to the exercise or devotion; the invisible world is the place appointed for the enjoyment of knowledge. There, the dawn of our infantile minds will be advanced to the maturity of perfect day; or rather, there our midnight shades will be brightened into all the lustre of noon. There, the souls which come from the school of faith, and bring with them the principles of love, will dwell in light itself; will be obscured with no darkness at all; will know, even as they are known.‡ Such an acquaint-

* 1 Cor. viii. 1.

† The righteousness of Christ. This is what Milton beautifully styles

——— The golden key
That opes the palace of eternity.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

ance, therefore, do I desire to form, and to carry on such a correspondence with the heavenly bodies, as may shed a benign influence on the seeds of grace implanted in my breast. Let the exalted tracks of the firmament sink my soul into deep humiliation; let those eternal fires kindle in my heart an adoring gratitude to their Almighty Sovereign; let yonder ponderous and enormous globes, which rest on his supporting arm, teach me an unshaken affiance in their incarnate Maker. Then shall I be—if not wise as the astronomical adept, yet wise unto salvation.

Having now walked and worshipped in this universal temple, that is arched with skies, emblazed with stars, and extended even to immensity; having cast an eye, like the enraptured patriarch;* an eye of reason and devotion, through the magnificent scene: with the former, having discovered an infinitude of worlds; and with the latter, having met the Deity in every view; having beheld, as Moses in the flaming bush, a glimpse of Jehovah's excellencies, reflected from the several planets, and streaming from myriads of celestial luminaries; having read various lessons in that stupendous Book of Wisdom,† where unmeasurable sheets of azure compose the page, and orbs of radiance write in everlasting characters, a comment on our creed—What remains, but that I close the midnight solemnity, as our Lord concluded his grand sacramental institution, with a song of praise? And behold a hymn, suited to the sublime occasion, indited by‡ inspiration itself, transferred

* Gen. xv. 5.

† ——— For heaven
Is as the Book of God before thee set,
Wherein to read his wondrous works.—*Milt.*

‡ Psal. xix.

into our language by* one of the happiest efforts of human ingenuity.

The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heav'ns, a shining frame,
Their great Original proclaim:
Th' unwearied sun from day to day,
Does his Creator's pow'r display;
And publishes to every land,
The work of an Almighty hand.
Soon as the ev'ning shades prevail,
The moon takes up the wondrous tale;
And nightly, to the list'ning earth,
Repeats the story of her birth;
While all the stars that round her burn,
And all the planets in their turn,
Confirm the tidings as they roll,
And spread the truth from pole to pole.
What, though, in solemn silence, all
Move round the dark terrestrial ball?
What though, nor real voice nor sound
Amid their radiant orbs be found?
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
And utter forth a glorious voice,
For ever singing, as they shine,
The hand that made us, is divine.

* Addison, Spec. vol. vi. No. 465.

A

WINTER-PIECE.

'Tis true, in the delightful seasons his tenderness and his love are most eminently displayed. In the vernal months, all is beauty to the eye, and music to the ear The clouds drop fatness; the air softens into balm; and flowers, in rich abundance, spring wherever we tread, bloom wherever we look. Amidst the burning heats of summer, he expands the leaves, and thickens the shades. He spreads the cooling harbour to receive us, and awakens the gentle breeze to fan us; the moss swells into a couch for the repose of our bodies, while the rivulet softly rolls and sweetly murmurs to soothe our imagination. In autumn, his bounty covers the fields with a profusion of nutrimental treasure, and bends the boughs with loads of delicious fruit; he furnishes his hospitable board with present plenty, and prepares a copious magazine for future wants. But is it only in these smiling periods of the year, that God, the all-gracious God, is seen? Has winter, stern winter, no tokens of his presence? Yes; all things are eloquent of his praise. 'His way is in the whirlwind.' Storms and tempests fulfil his word, and extol his power. Even piercing frosts bear witness to his goodness, while they bid the shivering nations tremble at his wrath. Be winter then, for a while, our theme. Perhaps those barren scenes may

be fruitful of intellectual improvement. Perhaps, that rigorous cold, which binds the earth in icy chains, may serve to enlarge our hearts, and warm them with holy love.

See! how the day is shortened! The sun, detained in fairer climes, or engaged in more agreeable services, rises, like an unwilling visitant, with tardy and reluctant steps. He walks, with a shy indifference, along the edges of the southern sky; casting an oblique glance, he just looks upon our dejected world, and scarcely scatters light through the thick air. Dim is his appearance, languid are his gleams, while he continues. Or, if he chance to wear a brighter aspect, and a cloudless brow; yet, like the young and gay in the house of mourning, he seems uneasy till he is gone; is in haste to depart. And let him depart. Why should we wish for his longer stay, since he can show us nothing but the Creation in distress? The flowery families lie dead, and the tuneful tribes are struck dumb. The trees, stripped of their verdure, and lashed by storms, spread their naked arms to the enraged and relentless heavens. Fragrance no longer floats in the air; but chilling damps hover, or cutting gales blow. Nature, divested of all her beautiful robes, sits like a forlorn disconsolate widow, in her weeds; while winds in doleful accents howl, and rains in repeated showers, weep.

We regret not, therefore, the speedy departure of the day. When the room is hung with funeral black, and dismal objects are all round, who would desire to have the glimmering taper kept alive, which can only discover spectacles of sorrow, can only make the horror visible? And, since this mortal life is little better than a continual conflict with sin, or an un-

remitted struggle with misery; is it not a gracious ordination which has reduced our age to a span? Fourscore years of trial for the virtuous are sufficiently long; and more than such a term, allowed to the wicked, would render them beyond all measure vile. Our way to the kingdom of heaven lies through tribulations. Shall we then accuse, shall we not rather bless, the Providence, which has made the passage short? Soon, soon we cross the vale of tears, and then arrive on the happy hills, where light for ever shines, where joy for ever smiles.

Sometimes the day is rendered shorter still, is almost blotted out from the year. The vapours gather, they thicken into an impenetrable gloom, and obscure the face of the sky. At length the rains descend, the sluices of the firmament are opened, and the low-hung clouds pour their congregated stores. Copious and unintermitted, still they pour, and still are unexhausted. The waters drop incessantly from the eaves, and rush in rapid streams from the spouts. They roar along the channelled pavements, and stand in foul shallows amidst the village streets. Now, if the inattentive eye or negligent hand has left the roof but scantily covered, the insinuating element finds its way into every flaw, and, oozing through the ceiling, at once upbraids and chastises the careless inhabitant. The ploughman, soaked to the skin, leaves his half-tilled acre. The poor poultry, dripping with wet, crowd into shelter. The tenants of the bough fold up their wings, afraid to launch into the streaming air. The beasts, joyless and dispirited, ruminate under their sheds. The roads swim, and the brooks swell. The river, amidst all this watery ferment, long contained itself within its appointed bounds; but,

swollen by innumerable currents, and roused, at last, into uncontrollable rage, bursts over its banks, shoots into the plain, bears down all opposition, spreads itself far and wide, and buries the meadow under a brown, sluggish, soaking deluge.

How happy for man, that this inundation comes, when there are no flowery crops in the valley to be overwhelmed; no fields standing thick with corn to be laid waste! At such a juncture, it would have been ruin to the husbandman and his family; but, thus timed, it yields manure for his ground, and promises him riches in reversion. How often, and how long, has the Divine Majesty bore with the most injurious affronts from sinners! His goodness triumphed over their perverseness, and graciously refused to be exasperated. But, O presumptuous creatures, multiply no longer your provocations. Urge not, by repeated iniquities, the Almighty arm to strike; lest his long-suffering cease, and his fierce anger break forth, like a flood of waters,* and sweep you away into irrecoverable and everlasting perdition.

How mighty! how majestic! and O! how mysterious, are thy works, thou God of heaven and Lord of nature! When the air is calm, where sleep the stormy winds? In what chambers are they reposed, or in what dungeons confined; till thou art pleased to awaken their rage, and throw open their prison doors? Then, with irresistible impetuosity they fly forth, scattering dread and menacing destruction.

The atmosphere is hurled into the most tumultuous confusion. The aërial torrent bursts its way over mountains, seas, and continents. All things feel the dreadful shock. All things tremble before the furious

* Hos. v. 10.

blast. The forest, vexed and tore, groans under the scourge. Her sturdy sons are strained to the very root, and almost sweep the soil, they were wont to shade. The stubborn oak, that disdains to bend, is dashed headlong to the ground; and, with shattered arms, with prostrate trunk, blocks the road; while the flexile reed, that springs up in the marsh, yielding to the gust (as the meek and pliant temper, to injuries, or the resigned and patient spirit, to misfortunes), eludes the force of the storm, and survives amidst the wide-spread havoc.

For a moment, the turbulent and outrageous sky seems to be assuaged; but it intermits its wrath, only to increase its strength. Soon the sounding squadrons of the air return to the attack, and renew their ravages with redoubled fury. The stately dome rocks amidst the wheeling clouds. The impregnable tower totters on its basis; and threatens to overwhelm, whom it was intended to protect. The ragged rock is rent in pieces;* and even the hills, the perpetual hills, on their deep foundations, are scarcely secure. Where, now, is the place of safety, when the city reels, and houses become heaps? Sleep affrighted flies. Diversion is turned into horror. All is uproar in the element; all is consternation among mortals; and nothing but one wide scene of rueful devastation through the land. Yet, this is only an inferior minister of divine displeasure; the executioner of milder indignation. How then,—O! how will the lofty looks of man be humbled, and the haughtiness of men be bowed down; when the Lord God Omnipotent shall meditate terror—when he shall

* 1 Kings xix. 11.

set all his terrors in array—when he arises, to judge the nations, and to shake terribly the earth!

The ocean swells with tremendous commotions. The ponderous waves are heaved from their capacious bed, and almost lay bare the unfathomable deep. Flung into the most rapid agitation, they sweep over the rocks; they lash the lofty cliffs; and toss themselves into the clouds. Navies are rent from their anchors; and, with all their enormous load, are whirled, swift as the arrow, wild as the winds, along the vast abyss. Now they climb the rolling mountain; they plough the frightful ridge, and seem to skim the skies. Anon, they plunge into the opening gulf; they lose the sight of day; and are lost themselves to every eye. How vain is the pilot's art! how impotent the mariner's strength! They reel to and fro, and stagger in the jarring hold; or cling to the cordage, while bursting seas foam over the deck. Despair is in every face, and death sits threatening on every surge. But why, O ye astonished mariners, why should you abandon yourselves to despair? Is the Lord's hand shortened, because the waves of the sea rage horribly? Is his ear deafened by the roaring thunders and the bellowing tempest? Cry, cry unto him, who 'holdeth the winds in his fist, and the waters in the hollow of his hand.' He is all gracious to hear, and almighty to save. If he command, the storm shall be hushed to silence; the billows shall subside into a calm; the lightnings shall lay their fiery bolts aside; and, instead of sinking in a watery grave, you shall find yourselves brought to the desired haven.

Sometimes, after a joyless day, a more dismal night succeeds. The lazy, lowering vapours had wove so

thick a veil, as the meridian sun could scarcely penetrate. What gloom then must overwhelm the nocturnal hours! The moon withdraws her shining. Not a single star is able to struggle through the deep arrangement of shades. All is pitchy darkness, without one enlivening ray. How solemn! how awful! 'Tis like the shroud of nature, or the return of chaos. I don't wonder that it is the parent of terrors, and so apt to engender melancholy. Lately, the tempest marked its rapid way with mischief; now the night dresses her silent pavilion with horror.

I have sometimes left the beaming tapers, withdrawn from the ruddy fire, and plunged into the thickest of these sooty shades, without regretting the change, rather exulting in it as a welcome deliverance. The very gloom was pleasing, was exhilarating, compared with the conversation I quitted. The speech of my companions (how does it grieve me, that I should even once have occasion to call them by that name!) was the language of darkness; was horror to the soul, and torture to the ear. Their teeth were spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword, to stab and assassinate their neighbours' character. Their throat was an open sepulchre, gaping to devour the reputation of the innocent, or tainting the air with their virulent and polluted breath. Sometimes, their licentious and ungovernable discourse shot arrows of profaneness against heaven itself; and, in proud defiance, challenged the resentment of Omnipotence. Sometimes, as if it was the glory of human nature to cherish the grossest appetites of the brute, or the mark of a gentleman to have served an apprenticeship in a brothel; the filthiest jests of the stews (if low obscenity can be a jest) were nauseously obtruded on the company. All the modest part were offended

and grieved; while the other besotted creatures laughed aloud, though the leprosy of uncleanness appeared on their lips. Are not these persons prisoners of darkness; though blazing sconces pour artificial day through their rooms? Are not their souls immured in the most baleful shades; though the noontide sun is brightened, by flaming on their gilded chariots? They discern not that great and adorable Being, who fills the universe with his infinite and glorious presence; who is all eye to observe their actions, all ear to examine their words. They know not the all-sufficient Redeemer, nor the unspeakable blessedness of his heavenly kingdom. They are groping for the prize of happiness, but will certainly grasp the thorn of anxiety. They are wantonly sporting on the brink of a precipice; and are every moment in danger of falling headlong into irretrievable ruin and endless despair.

They have forced me out, and are, perhaps, deriding me in my absence; are charging my reverence for the ever-present God, and my concern for the dignity of our rational nature, to the account of humour and singularity, to narrowness of thought or sourness of temper. Be it so. I will indulge no indignation against them. If any thing like it should arise, I will convert it into prayer—'Pity them, O thou Father of Mercies! Show them the madness of their profaneness! Show them the baseness of their vile ribaldry! Let their dissolute rant be turned into silent sorrow and confusion; till they open their lips to adore thine insulted majesty, and to implore thy gracious pardon; till they devote to thy service, those social hours, and those superior faculties, which they are now abusing—to the dishonour of thy name—to the contamination of their own souls—and (unless

timely repentance intervene) to their everlasting infamy and perdition.'

I ride home amidst the gloomy void. All darkling and solitary, I can scarce discern my horse's head: and only guess out my blind road. No companion but danger, or perhaps 'destruction ready at my side.'* But why do I fancy myself solitary? Is not the Father of Lights, the God of my life, the great and everlasting Friend, always at my right hand? Because the day is excluded, is his Omnipresence vacated? Though I have no earthly acquaintance near, to assist in case of a misfortune; or to beguile the time, and divert uneasy suspicions, by entertaining conferences; may I not lay my help upon the Almighty, and converse with God by humble supplication? For this exercise, no place is improper, no hour unseasonable, and no posture incommodious. This is society, the best of society, even in solitude. This is a fund of delights, easily portable, and quite inexhaustible. A treasure this, of unknown value; liable to no hazard from wrong or robbery; but perfectly secure to the lonely wanderer in the most darksome paths.

And why should I distress myself with apprehensions of peril? This access to God is not only an indefeasible privilege, but a kind of ambulatory garrison. Those who make known their requests unto God, and rely upon his protecting care, he gives his angels charge over their welfare. His angels are commissioned to escort them in their travelling, and to hold up their goings, that they dash not their foot against a stone.† Nay, he himself condescends to

* Job xviii. 12. † Psal. xci. 11, 12.

be their guardian, and 'keeps all their bones, so that not one of them is broken.' Between these persons and the most mischievous objects, a treaty of peace is concluded. The articles of this grand alliance are recorded in the book of revelation; and will, when it is for the real benefit of believers, assuredly be made good in the administration of providence. In that day, saith the Lord, will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground; and they shall be in league with the stones of the field.* Though they fall headlong on the flints; even the flints, fitted to fracture the skull, shall receive them as into the arms of friendship; and not offer to hurt whom the Lord is pleased to preserve.

May I then enjoy the presence of this gracious God, and darkness and light shall be both alike. Let him whisper peace to my conscience; and this dread silence shall be more charming than the voice of eloquence, or the strains of music. Let him reveal his ravishing perfections in my soul, and I shall not want the saffron beauties of the morn, the golden glories of noon, or the impurpled evening sky. I shall sigh only for the most desirable and distinguished realms; where the light of his countenance perpetually shines, and consequently 'there is† no night there.'

How surprising are the alterations of nature! I left her, the preceding evening, plain and unadorned. But now a thick rime has shed its hoary honours over all. It has shagged the fleeces of the sheep, and crisped the traveller's locks. The hedges are richly fringed, and all the ground is profusely powdered.

* Job v. 23. Hos. ii. 13. † Rev. xxi. 35.

The downward branches are tasselled with silver, and the upright are feathered with the plumy wave.

The fine are not always the valuable. The air, amidst all these gaudy decorations, is charged with chilling and unwholesome damps. The raw hazy influence spreads wide, sits deep, hangs heavy and oppressive on the springs of life. A listless languor clogs the animal functions, and the purple stream glides but faintly through its channels. In vain, the ruler of the day exerts his beaming powers; in vain, he attempts to disperse this insurrection of vapours. The sullen, malignant cloud refuses to depart. It envelops the world, and intercepts the prospect. I look abroad for the neighbouring village; I send my eye in quest of the rising turret; but am scarce able to discern the very next house. Where are the blue arches of heaven? Where is the radiant countenance of the sun? Where the boundless scenes of Creation? Lost, lost are their beauties, quenched their glories. The thronged theatre of the universe seems an empty void, and all its elegant pictures an undistinguised blank. Thus would it have been with our intellectual views, if the gospel had not come in to our relief. We should have known, neither our true good, nor real evil. We had been a riddle to ourselves; the present state all confusion, and the future impenetrable darkness. But the Sun of Righteousness, arising with potent and triumphant beams, has dissipated the interposing cloud, has opened a prospect more beautiful than the blossoms of spring, more cheering than the treasures of autumn, and far more enlarged than the extent of the visible system; which, having led the eye of the mind through fields of grace, over rivers of righteousness, and hills crowned

with knowledge, terminates at length in the heavens, sweetly losing itself in regions of infinite bliss and endless glory.

As I walk along the fog, it seems, at some little distance, to be almost solid gloom; such as would shut out every glimpse of light, and totally imprison me in obscurity. But when I approach and enter it, I find myself agreeably mistaken, and the mist much thinner than it appeared. Such is the case with regard to the sufferings of the present life; they are not, when experienced, so dreadful as a timorous imagination surmised. Such also is the case with reference to the gratifications of sense; they prove not, when enjoyed, so substantial, as a sanguine expectation represented. In both instances we are graciously disappointed. The keen edge of the calamity is blunted, that it may not wound us with incurable anguish: the exquisite relish of the prosperity is palled, that it may not captivate our affections, and enslave them to inferior delights.

Sometimes, the face of things wears a more pleasing form; the very reverse of the foregoing. The sober evening advances to close the short-lived day. The firmament, clear and unsullied, puts on its brightest blue. The stars, in thronging multitudes, and with a peculiar brilliancy, glitter through the fair expanse; while the frost pours its subtile and penetrating influence all around. Sharp and intensely severe, all the long night the rigid ether continues its operations. When, late and slow, the morning opens her pale eye, in what a curious and amusing disguise is nature dressed! The icicles, jagged and uneven, are pendent on the houses. A whitish film incrusts the windows, where mimic landscapes rise, and fancied figures

swell. The fruitful fields are hardened to iron; the moistened meadows are congealed to marble; and both resound (an effect unknown before) with the peasant's hasty tread. The stream is arrested in its career, and its ever-flowing surface chained to the banks. The fluid paths become a solid road; where the finny shoals were wont to rove, the sportive youth slide, or the rattling chariots roll. And, (what would seem, to an inhabitant of the southern world, as unaccountable as the deepest mysteries of our religion,) that very same breath of heaven, which cements the lakes into a crystal pavement, cleaves the oaks as it were with invisible wedges; 'breaks in pieces the northern iron, and the steel;' even while it builds a bridge of icy rock over the seas.*

The air is all serenity. Refined by the nitrous particles, it affords the most distinct views, and extensive prospects. The seeds of infection are killed, and the pestilence destroyed, even in embryo. So, the cold of affliction tends to mortify our corruptions, and subdue our vicious habits. The crowding atmosphere constringes our bodies, and braces our nerves. The spirits are buoyant, and sally briskly on the execution of their office. In the summer months, such an unclouded sky, and so bright a sun, would have melted us with heat, and softened us into supineness. We should have been ready to throw our limbs under the spreading beech, and to lie at ease by the murmuring brook. But, now, none loiters in his path;

* Job xxxviii. 30. The waters are hid, locked up from the cattle's lip, and secured from the fisher's net, as wells were wont to be closed with a ponderous and impenetrable stone; and not only lakes and rivers, but the surface of the great deep, with its restless and uncontrollable surges, is taken captive by the frost and bound in shining fetters.

none is seen with folded arms. All is in motion; all is activity. Choice, prompted by the weather, supplies the spur of necessity. Thus, the rugged school of misfortune often trains up the mind to a vigorous exertion of its faculties. The bleak climate of adversity often inspirits us with a manly resolution; when a soft and downy affluence, perhaps, would have relaxed all the generous springs of the soul, and have left it enervated with pleasure, or dissolved in indolence.

'Cold, cometh out of the north.' The winds having swept those deserts of snow, arm themselves with millions of frozen particles, and make a fierce descent upon our isle. Under black and scowling clouds, they drive, dreadfully whizzing, through the darkened air: they growl around our houses, assault our doors, and, eager for entrance, fasten on our windows. Walls can scarce restrain them, bars are unable to exclude them; through every cranny they force their way. Ice is on their wings; they scatter agues through the land; and winter, all winter, rages as they go. Their breath is as a searing* iron to the little verdure left in the plains; vastly more pernicious to the tender plants than the sharpest knife, they kill their branches, and wound the very root. Let not the corn venture to peep too freely from the entrenchment of the furrow; let not the fruit-bearing blossoms dare to come abroad from their lodgment in the bark; lest these murderous blasts intercept and

* This, I suppose, is the meaning of that figurative expression used by the prophet Habakkuk; who, speaking of the Chaldeans invading Judea, says, 'Their faces, or the incursions they make, shall sup up, shall swallow greedily, shall devour utterly, the inhabitants of the country, and their valuable effects; as the keen, corroding blasts of the east wind, destroy every green thing in the field.' Hab. i. 9.

seize the unwary strangers, and destroy the hopes of the advancing year.

O, 'tis severely cold! Who is so hardy, as not to shrink at this excessively pinching weather? See! every face is pale: even the blooming cheeks contract a gelid hue; and the teeth hardly forbear chattering. Ye that sit easy and joyous amidst your commodious apartments, solacing yourselves in the diffusive warmth of your fire, be mindful of your brethren in the cheerless tenement of poverty. Their shattered panes are open to the piercing winds; a tattered garment scarcely covers their shivering flesh, while a few faint and dying embers on the squalid heath rather mock their wishes than warm their limbs. While the generous juices of Oporto sparkle in your glasses; or the streams, beautifully tinged and deliciously flavoured with the Chinese leaf, smoke in the elegant porcelain; O remember, that many of your fellow-creatures, amidst all the rigour of these inclement skies, are emaciated with sickness, benumbed with age, and pining with hunger. Let 'their loins bless you,' for comfortable clothing; restore them with medicine; regale them with food; and baffle the raging wind. So may you never know any of their distresses, but only by the hearing of the ear, the seeing of the eye, or the feeling of a tender commiseration! Methinks, the bitter blustering winds plead for the poor indigents. May they breathe pity into your breasts, while they blow hardships into their huts! Observe those blue flames and ruddy coals in your chimney: quickened by the cold, they look more lively, and glow more strongly: silent but seasonable admonition to the gay circle that chat and smile around them! Thus may your hearts, at such

a juncture of need, kindle into a peculiar benevolence! Detain not your superfluous piles of wood: let them hasten to the relief of the starving family. Bid them expire in many a willing blaze to mitigate the severity of the season, and cheer the bleak abodes of want. So shall they ascend, mingled with thanksgivings to God, and ardent prayers for your welfare—ascend, more grateful to Heaven than columns of the most costly incense.

Now the winds cease. Having brought their load, they are dismissed from service. They have wafted an immense cargo of clouds, which empty themselves in snow. At first, a few scattered shreds come wandering down the saddened sky. The slight skirmish is succeeded by a general onset. The flakes, large and numerous, and thick wavering, descend. They dim the air, and hasten the approach of night. Through all the night, in softest silence, and with a continual flow, this fleecy shower falls. In the morning, when we awake, what a surprising change appears! Is this the same world? Here is no diversity of colour! I can hardly distinguish the trees from the hills on which they grow. Which are the meadows, and which the plains? Where are the green pastures, and where the fallow lands? All things lie blended in bright confusion; so bright, that it heightens the splendour of day, and even dazzles the organs of sight. The lawn is not so fair as this snowy mantle which invests the fields; and even the lily, was the lily to appear, would look tarnished in its presence. I can think of but one thing, which excels or equals the glittering robe of winter. Is any person desirous to know my meaning? He may find it explained in

that admirable hymn,* composed by the royal penitent. Is any desirous to possess this matchless ornament? He will find it offered to his acceptance in every page of the gospel.

See! (for the eye cannot satisfy itself, without viewing again and again the curious, the delicate scene) see! how the hedges are habited like spotless vestals! The houses are roofed with uniformity and lustre; the meadows are covered with a carpet of the finest ermine;† the groves bow beneath the lovely burden! and all, all below, is one wide, immense, shining waste of white. By deep snows, and heavy rains, God sealeth up the hand of every man; and for this purpose, adds our sacred philosopher, that all men may know his work.‡ He confines them within their doors, and puts a stop to their secular business, that they may consider the things which belong to their spiritual welfare; that, having a vacation from their ordinary employ, they may observe the works of his power, and become acquainted with the mysteries of his grace.

And worthy, worthy of all observation, are the works of the great Creator! They are prodigiously various, and perfectly amazing. How pliant and ductile is nature under his forming hand! At his command, the self-same substance assumes the most different shapes, and is transformed into an endless

* Can any thing be whiter than snow! Yes, saith David; if God be pleased to wash me from my sins in the blood of Christ, I shall be even whiter than snow. Psal. li. 7. See p. 281.

† This animal is milk-white. As for those black spots which we generally see, in linings of ermine, they are added by the furrier, in order to diversify the appearance or heighten the beauty, of the native colour.

‡ Job xxxvii. 7.

multiplicity of figures. If he ordains, the water is moulded into hail, and discharged upon the earth like a volley of shot; or it is consolidated into ice, and defends the rivers, 'as it were with a breast-plate.' At the bare intimation of his will, the very same element is scattered in hoar-frost, like a sprinkling of the most attenuated ashes; or is spread over the surface of the ground, in these couches of swelling and flaky down.

The snow, however it may carry the appearance of cold, affords a warm garment for the corn, screens it from nipping frosts, and cherisheth its infant growth. It will abide for a while, to exert a protecting care, and exercise a fostering influence; then, touched by the sun, or thawed by a softening gale, the furry vesture melts into genial moisture, sinks deep into the soil, and saturates its pores with the dissolving nitre; replenishing the globe with those principles of vegetative life, which will open into the bloom of spring, and ripen into the fruits of autumn. Beautiful emblem this, and comfortable representation of the divine word, both in the successful and advantageous issue of its operation! 'As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be, that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.'*

Nature at length puts off her lucid veil. She drops it in a trickling thaw. The loosened snow rolls in

* Isai. lv. 10, 11.

sheets from the houses; various openings spot the hills; which, even while we look, become larger and more numerous. The trees rid themselves, by degrees, of the hoary incumbrance; shook from the springing boughs, part falls heavy to the ground, part flies abroad in shining atoms. Our fields and gardens, lately buried beneath the drifted heaps, rise plain and distinct to view. Since we see nature once again, has she no verdant traces, no beautiful features left? They are like real friends, very rare; and therefore the more particularly to be regarded, the more highly to be valued. Here and there the holly hangs out her glowing berries; the Laurustinus spreads her graceful tufts; and both, under a covert of unfading foliage. The plain but hardy ivy clothes the decrepit, crazy wall; nor shrinks from the friendly office, though the skies frown, and the storm roars. The laurel, firm, erect, and bold, expands its leaf of vivid green. In spite of the united, the repeated attacks of wind, and rain, and frost, it preserves an undismayed lively look, and maintains its post, while withering millions fall around; worthy, by vanquishing the rugged force of winter, worthy to adorn the triumphant conqueror's brow. Nor must I forget the bay tree, which scorns to be a mean pensioner on a few transient sunny gleams; or, with a servile obsequiousness, to vary its appearance in conformity to the changing seasons; by such indications of sterling worth and staunch resolution, reading a lecture to the poet's genius, while it weaves the chaplet for his temples. These, and a few other plants, clad with native verdure, retain their comely aspect in the bleakest climes and in the coldest months.

Such, and so durable, are the accomplishments of

a refined understanding and an amiable temper. The tawdry ornaments of dress, which catch the unthinking vulgar, soon become insipid and despicable. The rubied lip and the rosy cheek fade. Even the sparkling wit, as well as the sparkling eye, please but for a moment. But the virtuous mind has charms, which survive the decay of every inferior embellishment; charms, which add to the fragrancy of the flower, the permanency of the evergreen.

Such, likewise, is the happiness of the sincerely religious; like a tree, says the inspired moralist, 'whose leaf shall not fall.' He borrows not his peace from external circumstances; but has a fund within, and is 'satisfied from himself.'* Even though impoverished by calamitous accidents; he is rich in the possession of grace, and richer in the hope of glory. His joys are infinitely superior to, as well as nobly independent on, the transitory glow of sensual delight, or the capricious favours of what the world calls fortune.

If the snow composes the light-armed troops of the sky, methinks the hail constitutes its heavy artillery.† When driven by a vehement wind, with what dreadful impetuosity, does that stony shower fall! How it rebounds from the frozen ground, and rattles on the resounding dome! It attenuates the rivers into smoke, or scourges them into foam. It crushes the infant flowers, cuts in pieces the gardener's early plants, and batters the feeble fortification of his glasses into shivers It darts into the traveller's face;

* Prov. xiv. 14.

† He casteth forth his ice like morsels. Psalm cxlvii. 17: which, in modern language, might be thus expressed; He poureth his hail like a volley of shot.

he turns, with haste, from the stroke; or feels, on his cheek, for the gushing blood. If he would retreat into the house, it follows him even thither; and like a determined enemy, that pushes the pursuit, dashes through the crackling pains. But the fierce attack is quickly over. The clouds have soon spent their shafts, soon unstrung their bow. Happy for the inhabitants of the earth, that a sally so dreadfully furious should be so remarkably short! What else could endure the shock, or escape destruction?

But, behold a bow, of no hostile intention!—a bow, painted in variegated colours, on the disburdened cloud. How vast is the extent, how delicate the texture, of that showery arch! It compasseth the heavens with a glorious circle, and teaches us to forget the horrors of the storm. Elegant its form, and rich its tincture, but more delightful its sacred significancy. While the violet and the rose blush in its beautiful aspect, the olive-branch smiles in its gracious import. It writes, in radiant dyes, what the angels sung in harmonious strains, 'Peace on earth, and good-will towards men.' It is the stamp of insurance, for the continuance of seed-time and harvest, for the preservation and security of the visible world;* it is the comfortable token† of a better state, and a happier kingdom—a kingdom, where sin shall cease, and misery be abolished; where storms shall beat, and winter pierce no more; but holiness, happiness, and joy, like one unbounded spring, for ever, ever bloom.

Gen. ix. 12—16. Rev. vi. 2.

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